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AS ONE POSSESSED



"AS ONE POSSESSED."



“AS ONE POSSESSED.”

A NOVEL.

BY

D. CECIL GIBBS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

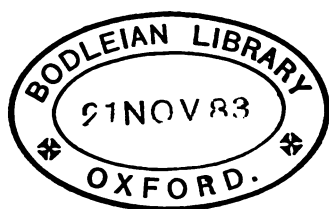
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“AS ONE POSSESSED.”



CHAPTER I.

THE entire village of Dingley was in a state of ferment ! Such a thing had not been heard of for the last twenty years or more ! At least such was the opinion expressed by the majority of the excited throng of village gossips, assembled outside the porch of the ‘Red Lion,’ to discuss the startling events of the previous night. A burglary at Dingley ! And at Miss Montgomery’s too, of all places in the world ! It seemed almost incredible. And yet the facts remained plain and ugly enough, that her house had been broken into, a large portion of the old family plate and other valuables abstracted, and last, but not least, that amiable personage, Miss Toodles, found

gagged and tied to a chair in her own apartment, whilst the box containing the funds of the Dingley Anti-Satan Society, of which she was treasurer, had disappeared.

Centre of the animated group stood Wiggles, the village constable, in full uniform, his staff of office at his side, and, although it was broad daylight, dark-lantern in hand. Here was a chance such as had rarely fallen to his lot before, of displaying his dignity and importance, and Wiggles was not the man to let it slip by unused.

Notwithstanding all the attempts of those around, to extract from him the details of the night's occurrence, Wiggles maintained a sphinx-like demeanour, and only replied to the thousand questions with which he was assailed, by a contraction of the muscles of the left eye, which he endeavoured to render intensely 'knowing,' and a few oracular remarks, such as: "I tell ye, lads—there's some on us as knows more than we cares to tell!"—intended to impress his admiring audience with a sense of the depth of the penetration and wisdom, contained beneath the carrot

poll of that representative of the majesty and power of the law,—Benjamin Wiggles.

Now, if the truth had been known, the worthy constable's reticence—like that of many other oracles—would have been attributed to its real cause, viz., his own lack of knowledge and information. As a matter of fact, the robbery had remained undiscovered until seven o'clock in the morning, when John, the page-boy, on coming down to open the shutters and arouse Mr. Buzby, the butler, discovered to his astonishment and dismay, that part of his duty had already been performed for him,—one of the windows in the dining-room being wide open, and the furniture in a state of confusion and disarray.

The lad, who was by no means deficient in sharpness, lost no time in giving the alarm in the house, and then proceeded in all haste to summon the powerful aid of the great Wiggles.

That functionary was, as he afterwards remarked, 'wrapped in the arms of Murphy,' and required some considerable amount of pommelling, before he could be brought to

open his eyes or wits, to anything like a clear realisation of what had taken place. At length, however, John succeeded in making him understand that his mistress's house had been broken into.

Gradually, as Wiggles donned his outer-garments with the aid of his better-half (who herself, was in a state of great perturbation and excitement), he assumed a sternness of visage and solemnity of manner befitting the occasion. He began by cross-questioning John, in truly magisterial tones, extracting what he termed 'circumstantial hevidence,' and when the boy having performed his errand, prepared to return to the house, he was stopped by Wiggles, who said, 'he wern't agoin to let him out of his sight till he'd hexamined matters a bit more closer,'—and so he had to wait until the 'Arm of the Law' was ready to accompany him.

When at last they arrived on the scene of action, they discovered that Mr. Buzby had locked himself in his room, and could not be enticed out under any pretence, until he heard the voice of his friend the constable.

Miss Montgomery herself, the only member of the household who retained the slightest self-possession or presence of mind, was busy looking for traces of the robbers, and taking an inventory of her stolen property, so that she had not as yet remarked the non-appearance of Miss Toodles. On passing however her companion's room, which was situated on the ground floor and opened into the corridor with which the dining-room communicated, she fancied she heard a faint moaning noise proceeding therefrom. With the promptitude which characterised all her actions, the old lady opened the door, and discovered the shivering form of poor Miss Toodles clad in 'robes of snowy white,'—or in other words in *costume de nuit*—firmly pinioned to a chair; whilst a pocket-handkerchief tied over her mouth, prevented the utterance of any but the inarticulate sounds which had attracted Miss Montgomery's attention.

The droll appearance of the tall, gaunt figure, thus strangely attired and situated, was almost too much for human gravity, but perceiving that the poor thing was half-dead

with fright, suffocation, and cold, she quickly overcame her inclination to laugh, and called for some one to assist her in loosening the bonds which held Miss Toodles a prisoner in her chair.

In answer to her summons, Wiggles soon appeared, staff in hand, taking long strides, and talking in a very loud voice,—presumably with the intention of striking awe into the hearts of the malefactors—if any were present. Behind him came the page valiantly brandishing a poker, followed by Mr. Buzby, whose rubicund face had assumed a purplish hue,—the nearest approach to white of which it was capable; whilst the rear of the cortége was brought up by the maid servants, who only came because they were frightened of being left alone.

As soon as he caught sight of Miss Toodles, the constable's jaw dropped, and his eyes opened with blank astonishment. "Wall, I be blowed—if ever I see the loikes!" was all he could ejaculate; and then standing stock-still, he began to rub his head with the end of his staff, looking if possible more stupid

than usual. Mr. Buzby's face assumed a yet more ashen tint, as he reflected that this might possibly have happened to himself, and he edged a little nearer to his friend Wiggles; whilst the cook, house-maid, and scullery-maid shrieked in chorus, and ran away down the passage. John alone remained unconcerned, and burst into a fit of laughing, which he quickly smothered on catching the constable's eye fixed sternly and threateningly upon him; and at his mistress's bidding, he skurried off to the kitchen to fetch a knife (causing in his passage fresh terrors to the shivering females), with which Miss Montgomery proceeded to divide the bonds of her unfortunate companion.

At this juncture Wiggles seemed to recover himself, and stepping forward said with great dignity:

"I think, Marm, as 'ow it 'ud be better to leave things as they his,—till I've made my disposition to the Hinspector."

"But, my good Mr. Wiggles! I implore you," gasped Miss Toodles whose tongue was now at liberty. "You wouldn't leave me like

this—nearly suffocated,—my poor mother died of—”

“Never mind what your mother died of just now,” interrupted Miss Montgomery, impatiently. “And you, Wiggles, don’t make such a fool of yourself. Do you suppose, man! that I am going to leave anyone belonging to me in this state, whilst you mess and maunder about ‘taking dispositions,’ as you call it! Come, clear out all of you men folk, and let me get some clothing on the poor thing’s body, or she’ll catch her death of cold. You Martha, can stay and help me—and cook, you light your kitchen fire at once, and get her a cup of hot tea.”

There was no mistaking Miss Montgomery’s tone, and all the village knew, that when she said a thing in earnest, she meant it, and would brook no contradiction; so the ‘arm of the law’ slunk off, followed by the rest of the assemblage, muttering to himself “She may say what she loikes—but it aint regularity, nor proper!”

As soon as they had disappeared the good lady turned the key on them, and proceeded

to assist her shivering companion in the performance of a more suitable toilette.

Poor Miss Toodles! She was at first too bewildered and frightened to say or do anything but sigh or moan; but when properly clad, and with the sense of returning life and warmth, she essayed a sickly smile and a few broken words of explanation, her over-wrought feelings gave way, and she burst into a flood of tears.

Her mistress, with a kindliness which did her credit, let her have her cry out, and made no attempt to extract from her anything of the night's proceedings, until she grew calmer, and the passionate weeping gave place to an occasional sob and deep-drawn sigh of relief.

And when at last, amidst fresh outbursts of tears and hysterical laughter, she had gathered all the information Miss Toodles had to offer, it did not amount to much.

It seemed that she was suddenly awakened from a deep sleep, by the flash of a light before her eyes, and that before she could move or cry out, a heavy hand had been placed over her mouth, and only withdrawn to admit of

the introduction of a handkerchief, which effectually prevented her from giving the alarm. Then as she continued to struggle, she had been dragged out of bed by two men with blackened faces, who had pinioned her to a chair, whilst they proceeded to ransack her apartment. Beyond this, she knew nothing, for after remaining in her room for what seemed an eternity, they had gone out, shutting the door and leaving her to her solitary vigil. As regards the personality of the burglars, her information was even less distinct. Disguised as they were, and speaking only in hoarse whispers, she declared that she was unable to form the least idea of their identity. Thus, as nobody else had seen or heard anything of them, the affair seemed likely to remain enshrouded in its original mystery. Intelligent advice was hardly to be expected from the village constable, but not knowing where else to turn, Miss Montgomery was proceeding to consult him on the best mode of action, under these very unusual circumstances, when Mr. Buzby appeared at the door announcing the arrival of Mr. Henry

Irvine, who wished to know if he could be of any assistance.

Although not personally acquainted, Miss Montgomery had heard of him from Effie, and knew him as Lucy's brother, so sent a courteous message requesting the young man to step in.

When Henry appeared, hat in hand, he explained that in passing through Dingley, on a morning stroll, he had witnessed the unusual excitement outside the ‘Red Lion,’ and stopping to enquire the cause, had been overwhelmed with a dozen different accounts from as many sources, all delivered at once, and accompanied with a variety of pantomimic gestures. As a result of which, he arrived on the scene in a state of uncertainty as to whether Miss Montgomery, Miss Toodles, and all the rest of the household had been murdered in their beds, or whether only some of them had been killed outright, and the rest dangerously wounded.

Whilst accepting these marvellous rumours with the ‘grain of salt,’ Henry naturally felt some alarm for the safety of his sister's friend,

and expressed his delight at finding the ladies alive and sound of limb. Miss Toodles, in fact, whose powers of loquacity appeared to have overcome their temporary check, and who found herself suddenly elevated to the position of heroine of the hour, was busily detailing with a sweet smile, and for about the twentieth time that morning, how well she remembered her poor father's residence being burglariously entered, and how the consequent loss and annoyance had led to his untimely end, and her destitution.

Divided between the desire to obtain some clue to the robbers, and her longing to clear the house of the 'pack of chattering idiots,'—as she contemptuously called the dozen or so of sympathising villagers who, on the plea of furnishing assistance, were poking their noses in every room and corner, opening cupboards and boxes, and running riot generally amongst her 'Lares and Penates,'—Miss Montgomery was pacing impatiently up and down the dining-room, and forgetting her prejudice against the genus 'young gentleman,' wel-

comed Harry's advent with a warmth which surprised and delighted him.

"You know what the proverb says about the 'friend in need,' Mr. Irvine," she began, "and I shall really regard you as such, if you can tell me what I ought to do, or manage to instil a little energy and intelligence into the addle-pate of our village Dogberry."

"I shall only be too happy to do what I can," replied Harry, gallantly, "and first of all, if you will allow me, I will send a messenger over to Morton with a telegram for Scotland-Yard. This is a case in which a London detective may be of use in tracing the thieves."

As Miss Montgomery fully concurred in this suggestion, one of the carriage horses was promptly saddled, and John, looking like a fly on the back of an elephant, was started on the errand with instructions to stop on his way through Stoneheaton, which boasted a regular police-station, with a request that the Inspector would come over at once.

Henry's next task was to clear the house of its self-invited visitors, a process which tried

his tact and powers of persuasion to the utmost; for the people once in, were loth to move, and wanted to stop and see 'how it would all end'.

At last, however, his efforts were successful, and Miss Montgomery's residence once more assumed its normal appearance of orderly tranquillity, although its inmates still remained in a state of effervescence and excitement. The cook's nerves more especially seemed to have been rudely shaken, for several times during the morning, on hearing any strange or sudden noise, she had fainted into Mr. Buzby's arms. A proceeding which so powerfully affected that gentlemen, that he was obliged to disappear into his cellar, and have recourse to a bottle 'of somethin' soothin' and quietin' to the nerval system,' as he mournfully remarked to the bystanders.

A spirit of emulation being aroused in the bosom of Martha, the housemaid, she was led to attempt a like performance with Mr. Jaundice, who had come into the kitchen with a basket of vegetables, and remained a silent and amused spectator of all these proceedings.

But alas! besides being neither young nor romantic (and in Martha's justification be it said, that she selected him as a *pis-aller*), the gardener was a ‘canny Scot,’ and a married man to boot, and knew too much of the sex to be thus taken in. So just at the critical moment, when she was preparing to fall gently into his arms (having first donned her Sunday boots and open-work stockings for the occasion) he coolly turned his back on her, and walked away remarking: “One fule makes many, they say, but that's nae reason why I should join the party!”

Martha's disgust at such ‘ungentlemanlike’ behaviour was unbounded—but it had the effect of dispelling her faintness.

In the course of the morning the Inspector arrived from Stoneheaton, and was followed shortly by Effie Stanfield. This young lady heard of her aunt's mishap through Mrs. Irvine, to whom Harry had dispatched a pencilled note explaining his absence, and had ordered her pony-carriage, and driven over accompanied by her friend Lucy, to offer her condolences.

As a matter of course, the two girls re-

mained to lunch, and Miss Montgomery felt that she could not do less than invite Harry also; the more so, that since the arrival of the Stanfield equipage, the young man seemed in no hurry to depart.

At any other time, the old lady's suspicions would have been aroused by such alacrity in her service from a comparative stranger. But moments of excitement tend to loosen the bonds of prejudice, and she accepted his expressed desire to await the arrival of the London detective, as a welcome and unexpected proof that gallantry and gentlemanly feeling had not altogether died out of the present generation.

In fact, so strongly did she feel on the subject, that she took the opportunity of drawing her niece aside, and of informing her that her friend's brother was 'an honour to his sex, and one of the nicest, if not the only nice young man it had ever been her lot to meet'.

Miss Effie looked up in her aunt's face with an assenting smile, in which innocent wonderment strove hard to retain the mastery over roguish merriment.

It was too strange to hear her own particular and private opinion, from the lips of so severe an old maid—one, in whose eyes a young man, and *the* 'old gentleman' were almost synonymous terms.

The little puss had a shrewd suspicion that she herself was the 'detective' Master Harry was so anxious to meet, and to hide her rising blushes, smothered Miss Montgomery's wrinkled cheeks with kisses, and calling her, 'her dear old tender-hearted dragon,' rushed off to romp with the pets, and 'draw' Miss Toodles for Harry's benefit.

After luncheon, the Inspector was admitted to make his report, a proceeding which created quite a flutter of excitement amongst the girls—including Miss Toodles.

Effie, who was accustomed to rule in her aunt's house with despotic sway, insisted on having chairs placed in a row to represent 'the bench,' and ordered Miss Montgomery to sit in the centre as presiding judge. Then acting on Harry's suggestion that there ought to be a dock, she made Mr. Buzby place three chairs back to back, and proposed that he

should stand inside to represent the prisoner. As, however, the portly butler positively refused to occupy so degrading a position, and appealed in tones of dignified remonstrance to his mistress, the spoilt child persuasively offered the post to Miss Toodles; but again meeting with a rebuff, she volunteered to occupy it herself, stipulating in an undertone to Harry, that he was to be the warder, and to be sure to hold her tight, if he didn't want her to escape.

Nothing loth, the young man smiled assent, and stepping up to the improvised dock with his self-constituted prisoner, took care not to release the little hand which lay so soft and warm in his own, during the rest of the proceedings.

"Effie, my dear, what a baby you are! You must excuse her, Mr. Irvine," was all the comment Miss Montgomery had time to make, for at that moment the astonished Inspector, ushered in by Mr. Buzby, stood before her, and begged leave to ask a few questions on the subject of the burglary.

"I'm sorry to say, Marm, that we haven't

been able to hit off any clue up to the present, though I've been hard at it since I came here. I suppose you've no reason to suspect any of your servants?"

"Certainly not," replied Miss Montgomery, with conviction; "I've known them all, man, woman, and child, for years, and not one of them has the brains, even if they had the wish, to commit so daring a crime."

"You'll excuse me, Marm, but —" here he coughed, and looked significantly towards Miss Toodles, who sat with a placid and inane smile, listening to an altercation between Harry and Effie.

"The same applies yet more strongly in this case," said the old lady in an undertone; "a bigger fool never existed."

"With your permission, Marm, I should like to ask the lady —"

"Had you not better wait till the detective arrives? Her mental powers won't stand a double cross-examination, and I'm sure the poor thing knows nothing of it."

"Very well, Marm, as you wish," replied the official, somewhat 'huffed'.

"By the way," continued Miss Montgomery, "is anybody missing from the village?"

"Not a soul, Marm, except the missionary gent, the Rev. Mr. Humbleby and his assistant, who was staying at the 'Red Lion,' and they left for London early last evening."

"That *I* can vouch for!" broke in Miss Toodles, who pricked up her ears at the sound of 'the reverend's' name.

"And what do you know about it, pray?" sharply inquired her patroness, on whom the aforesaid gentleman had the effect of a red rag on a bull.

"Nothing, madam—nothing of importance, at least not that I know of—only I happened to be out walking with Tiney, thinking he wanted exercise, and I met him—at least he met me—in Dobson's cart—and he barked at the horse, and pulled so at his collar, that I thought he'd strangle himself, and so Mr. Humbleby kindly stopped and got down to soothe him, and bid me good-bye, and he told me he'd had a sudden call to London, and was on his way to Morton to catch the train—which, as I remarked —"

At this juncture, Miss Toodles' intricate narrative was cut short by the entrance of Mr. Buzby, who informed the Inspector that a gentleman wished to see him outside; whereupon the official looked at his watch, and murmuring in a stage whisper:—"The detective—I expect," begged leave to withdraw.

Miss Toodles then proceeded to narrate that Mr. Humbleby had desired his best respects to Miss Montgomery, and went on to bemoan the loss of so eloquent and agreeable a teacher; but her maunderings fell on deaf ears, for all were anxiously surmising what the new arrival was like, and what he would say and do.

Further speculation was rendered unnecessary by the re-appearance of the Inspector, in company with a 'horsey' looking man of middle age, clad in the tightest of trousers, and a cut-away coat, with a flower in his button-hole, and a jaunty little cane in his hand.

This individual, whom he introduced as Mr. Smith of London, bowed blandly to the assembled company, and sank gracefully into the chair to which he was motioned by Miss

Montgomery; proceeding then to tap his brilliantly polished boots with the end of his cane, whilst he softly whistled a popular air under his breath.

"I've just explained the lay of the case to Mr. Smith," began the Inspector, after waiting in vain for his companion to break the silence, "and I think he'd like to have a little chat with you alone, Marm —"

"And that young lady," interrupted the gentleman from London, with a knowing nod in the direction of Miss Toodles. Instantly 'that young lady's' face was wreathed in smiles. "What a nice gentlemanly young man," she thought, "and so good looking too!"

Harry taking the hint, rose to open the door for Effie and his sister, with whom he retired into the garden. He thought he saw his way to a pleasant little *tête-à-tête* conversation with Lady Stanfield's daughter, who to tell the truth had lately come to occupy his thoughts a great deal, to the exclusion of his medical studies. In fact, since the garden-party, most of his time was occupied in devising cunning manœuvres, whereby he

'accidentally' obtained a daily sight of, or if possible—speech with, the pretty blue-eyed siren, who seemed nothing loth to encourage his attentions, although she must have been fully aware that they could end in naught but tribulation.

As soon as the young people had left the room, Mr. Smith turned to Miss Toodles with a bland smile, and asked her to be kind enough to inform him what she knew about the Rev. Josiah Humbleby and his antecedents. And that lady prepared to discourse by the hour on so congenial a subject, launched into a prolix account of his arrival at Dingley some weeks back, with letters of introduction and recommendation to her, as treasurer of the Anti-Satan Society, from the chairman of a kindred association in the Metropolis. Whilst lavishing her encomiums upon the saintly emissary, Miss Toodles took the opportunity of administering a sly thrust at her mistress, for her want of enthusiasm and appreciation.

"Yes, just so!" said the detective in a sympathetic voice, breaking in upon her narrative; "and so, I suppose—well it was

only natural—that the reverend gentlemen should be charmed by your countenance!”—

“Oh, Sir!” cried Miss Toodles, trying hard to blush.

—“Your support, I mean—though doubtless he was with your face too,” continued the officer gallantly. “And so you were thick friends, of course—met daily—confided all your secrets to each other—took walks together of an evening?”—

“I never said any such thing!” she exclaimed, this time blushing without effort.

“No, but you *did* it,” said Mr. Smith drily. Whereupon Miss Montgomery, who had begun to think the detective was merely amusing himself at her companion’s expense, exchanged a glance of intelligence with the inspector, and waited breathlessly for the next move.

Miss Toodles, whose objection to falsehoods generally, only extended to their being found out, was more than half inclined to give this assertion a flat denial. But there was something in the gaze of her interlocutor, a kind of conscious knowledge and power which made her pause and blunder out half-tearfully:

"Well, and if I did, where was the harm? I'm sure I only met him accidentally, when I was taking Tiney out for exercise, and if he chose to walk with me, and talk like any other gentleman—only much better—how could I help it?"

"Certainly not, my dear young lady. I should have done it myself, in his place," was the reply, accompanied by a bow, which quite restored Mr. Smith to her good graces.

The reaction, however, was but momentary. For the detective, warming to his work, began to ply her with so many and such inconvenient enquiries, that even Miss Toodles began to see the drift of his questionings, and rapidly passed through the morosely lachrymose state, into one of violent weeping and sullen silence.

However, it was all one to Mr. Smith, who maintained his smiling and imperturbable demeanour, and only once gently hinted, by way of a threat, that she had better make a clean breast of it, or it might be his painful duty to arrest her as an accomplice in the deed.

Poor Miss Toodles! Between her anxiety

to exculpate herself, and her desire to shield, as far as possible, the man whose honeyed words had wakened in her neglected heart the nearest approach to sensations of love and sentiment, of which it had been conscious through all these long years of enforced maidenhood—she passed a '*mauvais quart d'heure*'.

All the same—she had to confess that she had, in the course of conversation, informed her newly-made friend, of the value and whereabouts both of the cash box of the Anti-Satan Society, which was small, and of Miss Montgomery's plate, which was considerable; and, furthermore, had furnished him with an accurate description of the disposition and customs of the household.

On one point she remained for a long time obdurate.—Had she not arranged an interview at the dining-room window after all the household had retired to rest on the previous night? and to facilitate this, did she not leave one of the windows unlatched and the shutters not fastened?—This pertinent, and as she termed it impertinent, enquiry, tending as it did to

cast a doubt on her virgin propriety, and stainless moral character, no threats could force her to answer. But at last, on the repeated assurance of Mr. Smith that such an action, under ordinary circumstances, was not only innocent but laudable, in fact was practised by all 'young and lovely females of high rank when they was a' courting,' from Juliet downwards, she admitted that yielding to the eloquent persuasions of her reverend Romeo, she had consented to wait at the window for '*one last fond look, one sweet good-bye,*' and that as, like the gentleman in the ballad, 'he never came,' she had gone to bed and to sleep, and forgot to make the place secure.

This was all Mr. Smith wanted to know, and so with a curt, "You may go now!" the weeping and bewildered Miss Toodles received her *congé*, and retired to her own room, sick of the world, and railing inwardly against the falseness of mankind in general, and of the Reverend Josiah Humbleby in particular.

CHAPTER II.

PERHAPS it is a truism—the remark that ‘all great events take their rise from small beginnings’. And yet, are not our daily life and conversation dependent upon, if not composed of truisms? Eliminate these, and their first cousins, Platitudes, and you close the mouths of nine-tenths of your acquaintances, and the doors of most of your churches, to say nothing of casting adrift a countless legion of authors and critics—book-originators, and book-destroyers, who would thenceforth wander up and down the world like a band of ‘froze-out-gardeners,’ shouting in dismal chorus: ‘We’ve got no work to do!’

Then again, who is to define what are the great events, and what the small?

A bad toothache is a very serious matter to me—but you, who are not suffering from it, regard my torment as of small moment

compared to the rotten state of Russia, or the misgovernment of Asia Minor.

And doubtless you are right from your point of view, and from that of the suffering Eastern peoples. But after all, 'my pain is my own,' and whilst it lasts, is more to me than the pictured misery of distant thousands.

Examples might be multiplied 'ad infinitum,' but the result remains the same, that the great events of life are those which immediately concern, and are great to ourselves.

Accepting this theory as demonstrated, the burglary at Miss Montgomery's was pregnant of important results.

In the first place, it caused the break-up, and final dissolution of the Dingley Anti-Satan Society; and secondly, it led to a declaration on the part of Harry Irvine, and a sort of informal engagement between himself and Effie Stanfield.

As before mentioned, the Society with its high-flown designation, and ambitious aims, had from the first, proved anything but a harbinger of peace in the village. Many husbands—and by no means the least intel-

ligent, objected to their wives leaving their homes and housewifely duties, to attend the weekly meetings, or as some irreverently termed them, the 'Hens' Congresses,' at the Red Lion. Certainly the amount of cackling and bickering at these reunions, was out of all proportion to the work performed, whilst many a sober-minded matron, would return to her own hearth with ruffled plumage, and voice set in a higher and not more melodious key,—the result of some warm wordy encounter with one or other of her neighbours, on the eligibility of Mrs. So-and-So to serve on the committee, or the comparative merits of flannel as against calico, in the manufacture of the sundry articles of clothing destined for the 'poor heathen'.

Now, it was hardly to be expected that 'Sartor Resartus' should have penetrated so far as Dingley, or that the male inhabitants, small farmers and shopkeepers, should take an intense interest in the 'Philosophy of Clothes' as enunciated by Carlyle, but they felt that their money and their spouses' time was little better than wasted on such chimerical objects ;

whilst, with the want of perception of their sex, they could not see why, because the 'wife of the bosom' had been worsted in an argument, she should want to vent her ill-temper at home, or worse still, din into their ears a verbatim account of all that had been said and done at the meeting.

Then again, although like the armies of the South American Republics, nearly every individual member of the Society held an office with a high-sounding title, it was impossible to make all of equal rank and importance. The 'reddest' Republic must have a President,—an army of Generals, a Commander-in-Chief. But even the struggles and intrigues at a presidential election in Bolivia, sink into insignificance beside the frantic efforts made by these village dames, to attain the post of Treasurer, and the consequent leadership of their Society. That Miss Toodles was eventually elected, was the result of her being regarded as a sort of outsider, and from her well-known amiable peculiarities, one who could be easily led or driven, as the occasion presented itself. And if report spoke true, between the contending

factions the poor lady had a 'life of it,' during her term of office, or would have had, but for her india-rubber-like temperament, and marvellous power of taking both sides of a question at once.

It has been remarked, that nothing aggravates a squabblesome female so much—as to agree with her. Granting the truth of this dictum—Miss Toodles' tenure of power would probably not have lasted long in any case. But the forcible entry of Miss Montgomery's residence, and abstraction of the Society's funds, brought matters to a climax. And when it came out that the Rev. delegate, that shining candle amongst the farthing rushlights, had been an imposter—an arch-wolf in sheep's clothing, the members' indignation and disgust knew no bounds.

They might perhaps have put up with the pecuniary loss *per se*, but this, added to the merciless ridicule of the opposite sex, and of their female opponents in the village, was more than they could bear. After a hastily summoned and tumultuous meeting, at which all the members spoke at once, and to the

effect that *they* personally had foreseen what was going to happen, and considered the Treasurer, or the Secretary (or any other official who chanced to be antipathetic to the Speaker) was solely to blame—the Anti-Satan Society was relegated to oblivion, or only brought up as an occasional weapon of offence, by certain ill-conditioned husbands.

Before finally quitting the subject it may interest the reader to learn that Mr. Humbleby, who was known to the London police under many aliases, and ‘wanted’ badly by that intelligent force, for several other little affairs of the sort, succeeded once more in baffling pursuit and enquiry. In fact, according to Mr. Smith, who appeared to entertain an admiration almost bordering on veneration for him, he was ‘one of the smartest cracksmen of the day, and a precious slippery customer’.

Miss Montgomery was fain to accept this as true, for he proved too ‘slippery’ for Mr. Smith; and she had to console herself for the loss of her plate, with the reflection that it was no mere tyro who had favoured her with a visit, but an artist, a real ornament to his

profession,—a man who single-handed had for years defied all the armies of the Law, and as far as she could judge, was likely to continue doing so with impunity.

To return to Miss Effie whom we left in the garden with Lucy Irvine and her brother.

It has already been mentioned, that the latter was verging on a sentimental attachment for the pretty blue-eyed fairy, whose acquaintance he had renewed after years of absence. Knowing as he did Sir John's prejudice against his family, and the disparity of their social position, he must have been aware that it was little short of madness to entertain hopes in that direction. And yet—But is it necessary to become his apologist? Youth does not calculate consequences too closely, and if a young man of five-and-twenty can steel himself against the charms of 'sweet eighteen,' when the latter lays herself out for conquest,—Well! he must be a very 'goody-goody,' or a very hard-hearted young man,—and Harry was neither.

We do not mean to infer that Effie 'flung herself at his head,' as the saying goes, or let

him divine too easily that his attentions were acceptable. Although scarcely out of the nursery, she was far too-advanced a coquette for that. At this period, she had not even made up her mind whether she really liked him or not. But he was there—on the spot,—a ready-made lover, to plague or to pet; and like a kitten with its first mouse, she determined to try the strength of her claws on her new plaything. Whether she eventually should deal him the *coup de grace*, or let him go—quit for a few scratches, would be a matter for after consideration.

How disgusting—how unmaidenly! some people may exclaim, and yet we venture to assert that few of our male readers, if they turn out the cupboards of their memory, but have known innocent and well brought-up girls, just as mischievous and apparently heartless as Effie Stanfield. As the Irishman remarked of his friend’s wooden leg—‘It runs in the blood’; and a woman so constituted is no more conscious of cruelty towards her victim, than our friend the kitten. Of course from the point of view of the mouse,—biped

or quadruped, the knowledge of this is but sorry consolation. Let us hope that eventually like eels they 'get used to skinning'.

Miss Toodles' cross-examination, which was prolonged far into the afternoon, left the young people the opportunity for free and unrestrained conversation, such as Harry had not yet enjoyed. After a few turns round the garden, Lucy ensconced herself in a shady nook, and was soon deeply immersed in a favourite author.

"Happy Lucy!" cried Effie with a saucy glance at the young man, who found the rôle of jailer so much to his taste, that he still kept one of her hands captive. "Give her a book, and she requires no further amusement. Do you know, I sometimes almost wish that I were a book-worm. It's so dull at home."

"I'm glad you're not a book-worm. I like people who want amusing,—that is, if they're people that I like, don't you know. And I like being amused myself," replied Harry, with enthusiasm.

"What a lot of likes! Is there anything else that you'd *like* in particular,—or is that

a hint to me to set about amusing *you* at once?” The roguish smile accompanying these words was almost too much for Harry’s self-control, particularly as her upturned face brought the prettiest pair of rosy lips within easy reach of his own. It sounded so like a challenge !—And it was meant for one ! The little rogue knew she was safe, in front of her aunt’s windows, and with Lucy seated not five yards off.

“There *is* something I should like in particular, and *somebody* I *do* like in particular, but I’m afraid to tell you what or who,” he replied, emphasising the ‘somebody,’ with a warm pressure of the little hand.

“Oh, do tell me. I’m awfully curious,” said Effie, with a look of innocent wonderment that rather staggered him. “You won’t ? How nasty of you ! I shall ask Lucy who it is, perhaps she knows.”

“Hush ! not a word. I’ll tell you some other time, or *now*, if you’ll come down to the end of the garden,” cried Harry, in an excited undertone.

But Miss Effie was too knowing to be enticed

by so transparent a device, and answered with a little pout: "Oh, never mind. If you don't want to tell me, you needn't. Besides, we can't leave poor Lucy here all by herself."

"Bother poor Lucy! Didn't you say just now, that she's happy alone with her book? What's the use of disturbing her?"

"Well, suppose we get a couple of books, and sit beside her. Or better still, get her to read aloud? Lucy, dear, will you read to us?"

Lucy looked up with a sleepy smile. Her beloved Shelley lay in her lap. Half-a-dozen other books were strewn around her seat, and she was conning the pages of 'Childe Harold'.

"What did you say, dear?" she asked.

"Effie wants to know if you ever read more than six books at a time?" broke in Harry, desperately. He hated poetry at best, and the idea of sitting down to listen to his sister's reading, thus throwing away the best chance he had ever had of pressing his suit, was maddening.

Again the innocent blue eyes were raised to his. Pussy does so love to give her victim

a little pat, as much as to say: 'You may get away if you like'. And then she looks round with a purr of satisfaction, knowing full well, that if he does make a dash for freedom, she can soon fetch him back again.

"No such thing, Lucy!" she said, with a merry laugh, "I asked you if you would read to me."

"If you like, dear, but I doubt if you'll care for this."

"Come, Effie—I'll race you to the end of the garden for a pair of gloves!" cried Harry, once more.

"Thank you, no. It's too hot to race, and I'm getting too old. I'd rather sit still and listen to Lucy, if you'll get me a chair."

Poor Harry ground his teeth, and mentally consigned all poets and books to a warm place. However, there was nothing for it but to obey. So he fetched a chair, and mooned sulkily away by himself with his hands in his pockets.

At the end of the garden was a shrubbery, which was separated from the boundary-wall by a wide dry ditch, spanned by a rustic bridge leading to a summer-house.

Arrived at the bridge, he leant gloomily over the hand-rail, listlessly watching the gambols of an old rat and her progeny in the ditch below.

“She’s a heartless little flirt, and not worth the trouble of running after!” he grumbled to himself. “Here have I been neglecting everything for the past month and more. Being growled at by the Guv’nor for idling my time away, instead of reading, or looking out for a practice, and all for the sake of a word or a smile from her. And now, just when I could have had her all to myself, and might have made everything square between us—‘she’d rather sit with dear Lucy,’ and listen to that poetry balderdash. Bah! I’m sick of the whole affair! I shall cut it, and leave the girls to follow!”

Softly, Master Mouse. Because Pussy turns her head away, cleans her delicate paws, or plays with her tail and appears to have forgotten your existence, it doesn’t follow that she means to let you go. She’s only giving you a taste of liberty, that she may enjoy the greater satisfaction in holding you once more, a shivering captive in her claws.

As Harry turned to go, a light and graceful figure darted out from behind a tree, and Effie stood before him, with heightened colour and downcast eyes.

"A penny for your thoughts!" she cried, with a merry laugh. "Now don't deny it, you were in a regular brown study, or a black one I should say from your looks. I declare, if there'd been water in the ditch, I should have thought you were contemplating suicide. Or perhaps you were meditating on some great philosophical truth, like Newton on the verge of discovering gravitation from the fall of the apple.—Only there aren't any apple trees here, and the discovery has already been made."

He tried to look stern, and retain his demeanour of offended dignity, but it was useless in face of that sunny smile.

"Where have you sprung from?" was all he said. "I thought you preferred Lucy's society—to mine."

"So I do, when you're cross. I can't think what's put you in such a temper."

"O Effie!—if you only knew," and he tried to take her hand.

But she saw her advantage, and meant to keep it. As he thawed, she grew colder, and womanlike, determined to make him own himself in the wrong, before consenting to a reconciliation. So drawing back a pace or two, she said: "I don't like people who fly into passions about nothing."

"*About nothing*, Effie? You don't understand—"

"I understand that you promised to tell me a secret, and then suddenly refused, and went off in the tantrums."

"It's nothing. You wouldn't care to hear it. Let's go back to Lucy, shall we?"

"Certainly. I shouldn't have come to disturb you—only—only—I thought you wanted to speak to me, and it's a pity to be in a bad temper on such a lovely evening—isn't it, Harry?" said Miss Puss, beginning to fear that mousey might escape after all.

It was the first time she had called him by his Christian name, and it sounded so pleasant—almost tender, from those pretty lips, that his stern resolves began to waver. Then a glance at her heaving bosom, and the lovely



eyes veiled by their long silken lashes, completely vanquished him.

"Effie, my darling!" he cried drawing her to him, this time without perceptible resistance on her part. "Do you really care to hear what I have to say?"

"So long as it's proper, and not nonsense, and you'll promise not to be cross any more," was all she had time to murmur, ere she found herself enclosed by a strong arm, and his lips pressing hers, while he blurted out his love in impassioned words.

"Nice, but naughty!" thought the little puss, who retained much more self-possession than he did. After all, a lover was rather a pleasant plaything. But how was it going to end?

Happily—or unhappily as Harry thought—Miss Montgomery's voice calling for her niece solved that difficulty—temporarily.

"You do love me, darling, a little, don't you?" he cried eagerly.

"I hardly know—Don't ask me now. Well perhaps, I do a very little! Don't, Harry. I *must* go!" and breaking from him she flew down the path like a frightened fawn.

"Not much to go into raptures about," grunts the middle-aged 'man about town'. "To steal a kiss from a little chit of a girl not out of her teens, who was ready to offer him one, if he hadn't taken it, or to flirt with him, or anything else in coat and trousers."

Quite right, Sir. But yet you bore your bachelor friends with ecstatic praises of the waist and ankles of Mlle. Célestine or Isabelle, or any other divinity of the foot-lights, who deigns to smile upon you, and grant you a few hours of her sweet (but expensive) society, in consideration of a dinner at Richmond, a drag to Epsom, or any of the costly vagaries which pass for coin-current in the realm of gallantry.

After all, Love is a species of lunacy, but so pleasant while it lasts, that we do well to close our ears to the hard matter-of-fact arguments of Reason, and enjoy it whilst we may.

Harry was no philosopher, nor was he more crazed than most young men under similar circumstances.

Simply—he was in love, and believed himself beloved in return by the most charming girl he had ever met.

What wonder then, that he hugged the discovery to his heart, and felt in the first flush, as though the earth was not vast enough to contain his happiness.

However,—perfect bliss,—even in visions,—is not for this world. His 'worm i' the bud' appeared in the form of the page-boy, who came to announce that tea was ready, and the young ladies were going to start home almost directly, and would be glad to give Mr. Irvine a seat in the carriage.

Accordingly, metaphorically rubbing his eyes, and collecting his senses, he followed John down to the other end of the garden, where he found the table set under the boughs of a fine copper-beech, and Effie doing the honours in place of her aunt, who sat in her favourite stiff-backed cane chair at her side.

"Come, Mr. Irvine," exclaimed Miss Montgomery, as Harry, endeavouring to look at his ease and quite unconcerned, appeared in sight. "We began to wonder what had become of you. These silly girls actually suggested that the burglars had returned to carry you off, and Effie here, had even donned her armour,—

I mean her parasol,— and started valiantly to your rescue, when I came out and called her back.”

The old lady was evidently in a good humour, and unaware of their meeting in the shrubbery. This was a relief to Harry’s mind, for friendly disposed as she had hitherto shown herself, he dreaded the keen glance and sharp tongue of Effie’s aunt.

“I’m sorry to have been the cause of such anxiety, and am much indebted to Miss Effie for her kind intentions,” he replied in a bantering tone, taking his cue from the old lady. “To tell the truth, I found such a comfortable nook in the shade, that I indulged in a little quiet meditation and fell to dreaming—if not asleep,—at any rate I had a vision—and a happy one too!” These last words were spoken in an undertone, meant only for Effie, who was just handing him his cup of tea.

But Miss Montgomery’s sense of hearing was keen. “Vision?” she said, “what’s that about a vision? I hate young men who indulge in such fads and fancies; it’s bad enough for a parcel of girls and old women!”

"Talking of visions!" exclaimed Effie, coming to her lover's rescue—"I have a vision of mother fretting and fuming at home. We really ought to start at once; she'll be thinking the ponies have run away—or something dreadful happened."

"Your mother's fool enough for anything, child!" said her aunt, tartly. "I've no patience with her 'nerves,' and her fancied ailments.—If she'd wake up and busy herself about her house, instead of lounging about all day, reading trashy novels,—she'd be twice the woman."

"Still she *is* my mother, Aunt Hilda," retorted Effie boldly, "and you've no right to speak of her like that to me."

Harry and Lucy fidgetted in their chairs. 'Family jars' are not pleasant for strangers, and they dreaded a further outburst from the fiery old lady who never would brook contradiction. The former rose, and mumbling something about seeing after the carriage, strolled towards the stables.

However, Miss Montgomery was pleased at her niece's spirit, and replied in a tone of

unusual mildness: "Quite right, my dear, to stand up for your own flesh and blood. But if you had suffered as much from other people's whims and fancies as I have, you would be inclined to be hard upon them too."

Although Effie had never heard in so many words the history of her aunt's early disappointment, she had gathered quite enough from her occasional outbursts of bitterness, and her mother's periodical fits of remorse, to form a pretty shrewd guess as to the facts of the case, and to feel sorry for Miss Montgomery's wasted and lonely life. Besides which, she entertained a genuine affection for the cross-grained old lady, who was rarely cross with her. Like the owner of a ferocious dog which flies at everybody but his master, she felt a sort of pride in being the sole recipient of her caresses. So she rose, and leaning over her aunt's chair exclaimed in fondling tones:

"You dear old thing, you know you're not half so fierce and terrible as you pretend to be, or you wouldn't put up with me, and all my whims and fancies. Harry declares that I'm full of them—Doesn't he, Lucy?"

The glib way in which her tongue rattled out young Irvine's name, and degree of familiarity which such an out-spoken opinion denoted, caused Miss Montgomery no little surprise. She raised her eyebrows, and began in a tone of remonstrance: “My dear Effie —”

“How funny!” broke in her incorrigible niece. “Auntie dear, you looked and said that just like mamma, when she's going to give me a lecture on my hoydenish manners! But I'm sure you're not,—are you, dear? I get quite enough of that at home. Besides, I can hear the carriage coming round, and here comes the great Buzby to announce it. Good-bye, darling—I'll drive over to-morrow or the next day, D.V. and W.P., which means, Miss Prince and weather permitting!” So saying, she pressed a dozen kisses on her aunt's wrinkled face, and seizing Lucy by the hand, dragged her forcibly across the lawn, and through the hall, nearly cannoning against the astonished butler, and causing her friend to leave a trail of books behind her.

The front door was held open by John, who vastly enjoyed Mr. Buzby's discomfiture, whilst

Harry was standing beside the pony phaeton waiting to help the girls in.

"Jump in, Lucy," she cried. "Castor and Pollux don't like standing, and we shall be awfully late."

"But the books," gasped Lucy. "And your aunt—I haven't said good-bye to her."

"Well, be quick, dear, and don't stop to read on the way. Here, Harry, you might go and help your sister—*Mr. Irvine*, I mean, but when I'm in a hurry, I can't stop to pick my phrases."

Thus admonished, Harry accompanied his sister into the house, and just met Miss Montgomery, who was entering from the garden.

The old lady had scarcely recovered the shock of her niece's words (which be it said, had been spoken advisedly with a view to paving the way to a confession on some future occasion), and was inclined to treat the young man somewhat coldly. However, in bidding her adieu, he managed so gracefully to insinuate his delight at having been able to render her some slight service, and thanked her so warmly for the afternoon's entertainment, that Miss

Montgomery felt bound to relax, and even expressed a hope that she should see him again.

This was just what Master Harry desired, and he drove off in high glee at the result of the day's campaign.

Effie's aunt remained immersed in deep thought. Was a match impending between this young fellow and her niece? And if so, how would the idea be received by Sir John and Lady Stanfield?

The old lady shook her head decidedly. "He'd never consent to it, I'm sure. He's too mean, and too puffed up to admit anyone without a title or a large fortune into the family. Ah well, its not my place to put him on his guard. I like the young man myself, and if my darling does too,—why shouldn't she be happy with the man she loves?"

Thus, owing to Miss Montgomery's rooted antipathy to Sir John, Harry had found a powerful ally, in a quarter whence he least expected countenance or favour.

CHAPTER III.

THREE weary weeks had elapsed since Herbert's departure. At least they were long and weary to Rose, to whom it seemed that with the 'Danube' most of her affections, and all her interest in life, had quitted these shores.

Who has not felt the dull leaden monotony for the first few days after parting from the 'loved one,'—the restless longing for news,—the utter inability to settle down to old occupations?

She was at home again, but it seemed like home no longer. Her heart was away on the stormy Atlantic, and every gust of wind that beat against her windows at night, caused her to awake with a cold shudder, or dream restlessly of shipwrecks and drowning men.

Even Mr. Melville, who, feeble and suffering in his own health, was not very observant of

others, could not fail to notice her white face and despondent air, and Mrs. Irvine took her niece pretty sharply to task on the subject.

"I call it downright ungrateful, my dear," she said, in her little sharp decisive way. "If he'd been ordered abroad on dangerous service, or had left you against your wish, you couldn't be more melancholy. But here is a fine, healthy, young man, strong enough to kill an ox, and do for any number of lions or savages, starting for a pleasure trip,—at your own request, mind,—and you sit down and mope and moan like a cow who has had her calf taken away!"

The simile was not very apt, but it brought a faint smile to Rose's lips.

"I know it's foolish, Auntie," she replied gently, "and yet I can't help it just at first. I daresay I shall get over it by and by. Everything reminds me of his absence, and I have a sort of horrible feeling that something dreadful will happen to him,—that I shall never see him again."

"Fiddlesticks and nonsense, child! What

has become of your common-sense and courage? There's trouble enough in this world without manufacturing artificial sorrows for ourselves. To begin with, there's your father, who seems sadly low and out of sorts,—he wants chirruping up,—and it's your place to do it.—Then Master Alfred will want a sharp eye kept on him, or he'll get into mischief, all alone in town. If I'd been Herbert, I should have been sorry to trust my affairs to such a young scatter-brain."

"I know you don't like Alfred, Aunt," replied Rose, bridling up, "but he's not quite such a fool as you seem to think him."

"I didn't say I thought him a fool, my dear, though I don't consider him a paragon of wisdom. But like all young men of the present day, he's fonder of play than of work, and apt to get into mischief. My boy is no exception to the rule.—We can't get him to settle down to anything. He wastes his time in prowling about the village, and dancing attendance upon Effie Stanfield. If this goes on, I really must get his father to speak to him seriously,—only men are so stupid in

these matters. He'll only burn his wings, by fluttering around that little flirt.”

Little did the good lady suspect that the singeing process had already taken place, and her son, as far as volition was concerned, was a helpless victim to the ‘little flirt’s’ charms. For Harry, feeling anything but secure in his position, and certain of determined opposition from the parental authorities on both sides, had been careful not to reveal his engagement, pending a more decided answer from his ‘in-amorata’.

Having fulfilled the object of her visit, in awakening her niece to a sense of present and pressing interests and duties, which, as she rightly judged, are the best antidotes to morbid repinings, Mrs. Irvine betook herself to the village, where she found and made, ample occupation for all her leisure.

One important factor in Rose’s depression was the anything but hearty reception she had met with at Ashwood Court.

She felt that Mrs. Ashwood was unfavourably disposed towards her, and that her visit had done little or nothing in removing her

barely concealed antipathy. Whilst the more than frigid reception, which awaited her on her return from Southampton after Herbert's departure, and Mrs. Ashwood's final leave-taking, without one word expressive of the hope that they should see and know one another better before his return, roused all her latent pride and feelings of resentment.

"She's a disagreeable, proud, selfish woman!" she cried, with flashing eyes and burning cheeks, to Alfred, as they drove to the station, "If it were not for Herbert, I would have told her straight out, how little I covet the honour of being more nearly related to her."

"She's not a gusher, I must say," was her brother's reply; and then recalling Ralph's instructions, he added, "Like mother, like son, I expect. He looks as though he could be cranky if he chose!"

Whether the rattle of the wheels prevented Rose from hearing these last words, or she was too much wrapped up in her own thoughts to heed them, she did not take up the challenge he had somewhat tremblingly thrown down, so the young 'ne'er-do-well' thought it wiser



not to return to the charge at present, and entertained himself by whistling a popular melody, till they reached their destination.

Arrived at Stoneheaton, Alfred found a telegram, purporting to be from Hopwood, but which in reality he had addressed to himself from the London Terminus, awaiting his arrival.

"What a bother!" he exclaimed with hypocritical concern. "I shall have to leave you two to your own devices, and run up to town for a few days. Hopwood wants to consult me about Herbert's affairs."

"Must you go, Alfred?" pleaded Rose. "Papa is not at all well, and he is always anxious when you are away—besides, he says your journeys to London always cost such a lot of money, which he can ill afford at present."

"Bosh! of course I must, and I'm sure you needn't growl, seeing it's about your precious lover's concerns!" was all the reply he vouchsafed. Then taking his father aside, after Rose had left the room, he 'put on the screw,' and drained the old gentleman of all his available

cash, under guise of a loan, to be repaid when he could get to London, and draw the liberal allowance which Herbert had offered him in return for his services.

"You see, sir," he urged with an assumed air of business-like gravity and importance, "being in the city, and mixed up with Stock Exchange business on a large scale, I shall be able to profit by Hopwood's experience, and do a little something on my own account. It'll be no trouble when we're investing Herbert's money in really good things, to run a little of our own with it. Of course, I shall only act under proper advice; and a few 'straight tips' will help me to take myself off your hands—or who knows?—perhaps even pull you round a bit!"

"Do you really think so? Well, perhaps, it is just possible. Mr. Hopwood seems to be a knowledgeable sort of man, and appears to do very well for himself. There's no doubt that large sums are made every day on the Stock Exchange," replied Mr. Melville with a regretful sigh. He shared the delusion common to many, that the establishment in

Throgmorton Street is a sort of Aladdin's Cave, where fortunes await everyone bold enough to enter and pick them up ; forgetful of the fact, that there, as in all speculative affairs, there are more blanks than prizes, and the latter do not generally fall to the lot of outsiders.

'Hope blooms eternal in the human breast,' and so in spite of all his previous reverses—in spite of the knowledge that the money he purposed risking, was hardly to be called his own—he once more lent his ear to 'the voice of the charmer,' and commissioned Alfred, subject to Hopwood's approval, to invest in the 'Ruby Mining Company,' which had just been launched by Baron Schwindel, the great foreign financier, on the strength of whose reputation, the shares were already at a premium and going up rapidly.

So Master Alfred betook himself rejoicing to the Great Metropolis, which he privately intended should be his permanent abode ; whilst Rose and her father gradually settled down into the old groove, in which their existence had run before Alfred had left

college, and they had made the acquaintance of the Ashwoods.

The favourable reports which Mr. Melville received from time to time of the "Ruby Mining Co.," brought back some of his old health and spirits. "The shares have advanced ten pounds since we got in," Alfred wrote, "and there's every prospect of their going up another ten or so, before they've done. Shall you stand as you are,—or plunge a bit more?"

Of course he decided on the latter proceeding, and wired his son to instruct his friend to buy another 100 shares. Alfred, who inherited his father's speculative mania in a more virulent form, did not see fit to inform him, that Hopwood was about to sell, for his own account, and did not advise further investments.

The notion of coining thousands at one stroke, intoxicated the young man, and he became possessed of the idea that the shares would keep rising for ever, so he put on every penny he could muster of his own, and urged his father to do the same.

The great Baron, whose fortune was esti-

mated by millions, and who 'fathered' half the Companies of the day,—held thousands of shares,—and did not intend to sell one,—so report said. But report did not say, that these shares had not cost him a penny piece, or that he stood behind a dummy share-holder, who was judiciously parting with a few hundred shares at a time, and that the price of these, which was all profit, found its way into the Baron's capacious pocket.

After all, Alfred and his father were no more foolish than thousands of unlucky investors, who believed in the bona-fides of a concern which counted noblemen, members of Parliament, retired officers, and men of business on its Directorate, and which was vouched for and puffed by engineers and mining papers. True, none of these had ever seen the mines,—but they had seen plans of them, and specimens of the precious stones, with which their depths were supposed to be stored,—and then,—well there was the £200 a year, and the allotment of shares,—and other men of note had joined the Board—so why shouldn't they? . . . Cheerfulness, like depression, is infectious,

and Rose felt her own spirits rise, with the marked improvement in her father's health.— Then too, a letter from Herbert, posted at Madeira, where the 'Danube' had touched, brought her a fund of consolation and joy, on which she felt she could draw for some time to come at least. The much dreaded Bay of Biscay was passed, and by the time the letter reached her, she calculated that they must be well on their way towards Cape Town, from whence she expected further news.

Herbert wrote in good health and spirits, and although he did not say much about Ralph, it was evident that so far, nothing had occurred to mar the harmony of their voyage.

This gleam of sunshine, however, was destined to be but transient. Another epistle, which arrived a few days later, involved the poor girl's mind in a maze of doubts and difficulties. It was written on paper redolent of Patchouli, and adorned with a very florid monogram in gold and colours, which Rose deciphered to be a *C* and a *D*, intertwined and linked together by a band of Cupids and flowers. The writing was pointed and full of

flourishes, and looked like that of a woman. Yet when she turned to the signature,—the words 'Chevalier Delaunay,' proved this surmise to be incorrect. The wording of this curious missive, was as follows :—

"MEES !

"Without doubt you are not aware, that in affiancing yourself to Mister Herbert Ashwood, you are taking the fiancé of another ! And that another my daughter ! It is with the greatest dolor, that I acquaint you of this fact, but my duty of Father and protector of my motherless child, impels me to open you your eyes. Mister Ashwood did offer himself to my Célestine, and since the law will not admit of two wives, I leave you to say whether I am not justified in addressing you.

"Receive, mees, the assurance of my devotion.

CHEVALIER DELAUNAY.

"MYRTLE LODGE,
ST. JOHN'S WOOD, *September 18—.*"

Rose read the communication through, with a sort of dreamy wonderment, and turned back

to con it again, without any clear notion of its import. Who was this Chevalier Delaunay, and what could he mean? It must be some mistake. It could not be Herbert,—her Herbert, whom he was referring to.—And yet, she turned eagerly to the letter again, and found it distinctly stated, that her lover, the man who had asked her to be his wife, was pledged to another!

The room seemed to swim round with her; and she felt a sickening sensation about the heart, succeeded by a deathly faintness. Whilst fumbling for her pocket-handkerchief, her fingers came in contact with Herbert's letter, received but a few days before. She knew it by the feel of the thin foreign paper. Instinctively she opened it, and laid it on the table beside the other. Now, which of these two should she believe? The warm assurances of the man she loved, and who she felt convinced loved her, or the insinuations of a stranger, who had artfully waited till his intended victim was too far away to rebut or resent the calumny?

Hesitation was not one of Rose's foibles,

“What a silly I am!” she cried, whilst the colour returned to her cheeks, as she pressed a loving kiss on her lover’s missive. “Frightening myself about nothing, like this! There, that is how such libellous nonsense should be treated,” and she turned to fling the Chevalier’s letter into the fire. At that moment she heard her father’s footstep at the door, and not wishing to arouse his curiosity, thrust it hastily into her pocket, and turned to greet him.

“Any letters for me this morning, my dear?” enquired Mr. Melville.

“Yes, papa, two or three,” she replied, gathering them up from the breakfast-table and handing them to her father, who looked hastily through them, and threw them down again, saying with an air of disappointment, “Nothing from Alfred. How’s that, I wonder?”

“I do believe, dear,” said Rose, playfully, “that you consider yourself ill-used, unless you hear every morning that your shares are worth a thousand pounds or so more. But it can’t go on for ever. Can it now?”

"There's no knowing. If half what they say is true, my £10 shares will be worth £100 one of these days. But it's no use bothering your little brains about business matters. Come, pour out the tea like a good girl. It's my department to make the money, and your's to spend it."

"That's what political economists call division of labour, though I must say I consider mine is the easier task," she replied taking her seat at the table.

"I'm not so sure about that," said her father following her example. "With a small capital, and good pluck and judgment, thousands of men make fortunes, though few know how to spend them well. I wish all the same, I'd had a line from Alf."

"Shall I write to him to-day for you, dear?"

"Do, my love, and tell him I shall be glad to be kept advised as to how things are going."

Accordingly, after breakfast whilst Mr. Melville was enjoying his morning cigar in the garden, Rose sat herself down to write to her brother.

She was again about to destroy the Cheva-

lier's letter, when it suddenly struck her that if Alfred could find out who and what he was, she might be able to form some opinion as to what had induced him to write to her. It would not be necessary to lay the whole circumstances before her brother, in whose judgment she had no great faith, but by an indirect question she might elicit information likely to prove useful, in case the correspondence should be renewed.

Her enquires were skilfully worded to avoid arousing his suspicions, but she might have saved herself the trouble, for Alfred had received his cue from Ralph before his departure, and the young scamp was only too ready to enter into any plot, by which he could pay out that 'prig' Herbert, as he chose to consider him.

The next day she received two replies to her letter. The one relating to the Mining Company, and general matters, was to show to her father,—the other marked 'private' ran thus:—

"DEAR ROSIE,

"I don't know what you know about

the Delaunays, or how you came to hear their name. They are in the acting line—at least the daughter is, and used to be an old flame of Herbert's, I believe,—but this is in confidence, mind. If you take my advice, you won't go routing up the past of Mr. Perfection,—or any other young fellow. Better leave it alone, if it's settled down—you'll only stir up mud.

Your affectionate brother,

ALF."

This seeming confirmation of the Chevalier's statement, was a terrible blow for poor Rose—the more so that it was unexpected. However, she was not one to sit down helplessly under her trouble. Herbert's honour had been impugned, and in his absence, she felt that she owed it as much to him as to herself, that the matter should be thoroughly sifted, even at the risk of 'stirring up the mud,' as her brother so tersely put it.

Then the question arose, in whom was she to confide,—to whom could she look for advice and assistance?

CHAPTER IV.

AS the outcome of her deliberations, Rose found herself one morning, shortly after the events recorded in the preceding chapter, at a small private hotel, where her brother had taken up his temporary domicile, in one of the streets which connect the Strand with the Embankment.

In contrast with her own bright country home, the place appeared dull and dingy in the extreme ; but, as Alfred explained, it was handy for the city, where he spent most of his day, and for the theatres and other places of amusement which he frequented at night.

" Besides," he added, " if ' Rubies ' turn up trumps, I shall cut this part of town altogether, and take chambers in the ' Albany,' or somewhere up Bond Street way, so it's hardly worth shifting for a week or two."

Rose agreed with him as to the desirability

of a more cheerful abode, although she was not so sanguine about the success of the new speculation as he and her father seemed to be. In his hours of temporary elation, Mr. Melville had often before confided in her, that 'this time,' he had hit upon a 'really good thing,' which was to relieve him of all his embarrassments. But the happy consummation had not yet arrived, and although she was not fully aware of the extent to which his affairs were involved, she knew enough to cause her to give to the future many an anxious thought.

Then, too, she was sorry to learn that her brother contemplated spending the winter in town. Not that his society at home was much of a boon to her; but he was something of a companion for his father, and she dreaded his being left alone, to the temptations and allurements of the great city.

However, she did not consider the present moment opportune for urging her views; and as it happened, Alfred's presence in London enabled her to carry out her plans, without calling for observation from the home circle.

In her perplexity as to the best mode of

treating the innuendos cast upon Herbert's character, she had conned over the whole list of her relations and friends, in the vain search for one to whom she could open her mind in unreserved confidence, and on whose advice, in so delicate a matter, she could fully rely.

Her father was too unwell, and already too overborne with troubles and vexations for her to wish to add to them ; besides which, strong filial affection could not blind her to the fact, that he was utterly wanting in the force of mind and will, essential in a mentor.

As to Alfred,—well, there is no disguising the truth, that her opinion, founded upon bitter experience of his moral character, was a decidedly low one ; and he was one of the last men in the world she would invite to sit in judgment upon her lover's conduct.

Mrs. Irvine, although the essence of kindness, and priding herself upon her common sense, was, she felt, too flighty and excitable, to be entrusted with so weighty a secret. Everything was superlative with the little woman, who 'tore her hair,' 'had fits,' and 'nearly died of laughing,' 'or crying,' as the case might be, on

the slightest possible provocation, and worst of all in Rose's eyes, and under these peculiar circumstances, was an inveterate gossip.

Of her uncle, the Rector, she stood too much in awe, and feared that the mere fact of Herbert's name being mentioned in the same breath with that of an actress, would be more than sufficient reason in his sight, for condemning him without further enquiry.

And so amongst her many possible counselors, after striking out those who were too weak-minded, and those who erred in the opposite direction, those who were too deeply interested to be impartial, and those who were too callous to be interested; there remained, as the only person who would offer her advice after her own mind,—and this was the only advice that this strong-minded young lady was likely to follow—herself.

"I must go up to London," she said, "I must see this chevalier or his daughter face to face, and get at the truth of the matter. It is so much easier to write a lie, than to speak one,—or at any rate, it is easier to detect the latter."

Her resolution once taken, she was not long in putting it into execution. On the plea of taking advantage of Alfred's being in town, to do a round of shopping, she readily gained her father's consent to her absence for a day or two. Then a line to her brother to the same effect, and stating that she would be with him on the forenoon of the following day, precluded the possibility of any objections on his part.

As a matter of fact, Alfred growled and grumbled, and wondered 'what the deuce she was after now'; but all the same he obeyed her behests—secured a couple of rooms for his sister and her maid, and went to meet her at the station.

“Well, dear, I expect you were surprised at receiving my letter, but Mary and I had some important commissions in town, and thought you would not mind extending your protection to us for a night or two,” said Rose as they drove along in a hansom, leaving Mary to follow with the luggage in a 'growler'. You need not be afraid that we shall quarter ourselves upon you too long, or take up too much

of your time. I must return to-morrow, or the next day at latest."

Alfred mumbled something about being glad to see her, and if it wasn't that business matters must be attended to, he would have offered to take her about.

"Now, don't you trouble yourself about that. We'll arrange to breakfast and dine together, if that suits you; and for the rest, we'll go our separate ways. Mary and I, being two strong-minded females, are quite capable of taking care of ourselves."

This declaration somewhat mollified Master Alfred, who dreaded 'being dragged about in the tail of a pack of women,' and did not fancy the notion of giving up his evening's engagements for the sake of entertaining his sister. He was essentially selfish and lazy, but like most of us, not bad-tempered when he was not put out. Accordingly, he suggested that as the hotel was well enough to sleep at, but not the liveliest place wherein to spend the day, they should adjourn to Blanchard's for lunch; and during the meal became, for him, quite amiable and communicative.

Rose took advantage of this mood, to extract from him some further particulars with regard to the Delaunays and their mode of life; and was rather shocked to hear that Mlle. Célestine was accustomed in her *rôle* of bouffla actress, to appear before the public at times, in the scantiest costume allowable by the not too severe censorship of the Lord Chamberlain and the taste of the British public.

She had pictured to herself, in her ignorance of the prevailing fancy of the day, for topical songs, and actresses who rival one another in a liberal display of nature's charms—some severe and classic beauty, who walked the stage clad in robes of velvet or massive satin, and carried away the hearts of her audience by her magnificent rendering of Shakspeare, or some of our other great dramatists. To such a one, she felt she could appeal for an honest and straightforward statement, without in any sense derogating from her own dignity. But to have to own herself the rival of a ballet-dancer! Pah! The notion was sickening, and she heartily wished that she had remained at home.

Their repast being concluded, Alfred, who had a shrewd suspicion which way his sister's thoughts were tending, and took a malicious pleasure in 'putting a spoke in Master Herbert's wheel,' began to fidget about, and look at his watch, muttering something about an appointment in the city. Rose quickly took the hint, and expressed her readiness to go. Accordingly, the bill was settled, and her brother accompanied her as far as the hotel where he left her, promising to come back to dinner at seven o'clock.

Left to herself, Rose reviewed the situation as calmly as she was able. She did not like to be baulked in her intention of clearing up the mystery with regard to Herbert's relations with this Mlle. Delaunay. And yet, the idea of a scene, with a person of that description, was inexpressibly repugnant to her. Where was Myrtle Lodge, St. John's Wood?—For all she knew, some cheap lodging-house in a black slum.

However, Mary could accompany her, and—happy thought!—money would buy from a

girl of that class, the information which mere persuasion might fail to elicit.

So she rang the bell, ordered a cab, and sent for her maid, and after placing a £5 note within easy reach of her hand, inside her muff, she sallied forth on her quest.

Thinking it advisable to prepare Mary against a surprise, she informed her that she was going to visit a poor girl in somewhat distressed circumstances. Great, therefore, was their astonishment, when after traversing the forbidding neighbourhood which separates the Strand from Oxford Street, and thence, through gloomy, but respectable squares, into Regent's Park, their Jehu pulled up at a trim little bijou residence overlooking the Park, with a small front-garden, enclosed in ornamental railings.

At the gate, stood a neatly appointed coupé-brougham, the driver of which, 'got up' in irreproachable boots and leathers, was conversing familiarly with a close-shaved foreign-looking man-servant, in undress livery.

"This cannot be the place," cried Rose, putting her head out of the cab-window. "You

must have made a mistake, coachman. Is this Myrtle Lodge?"

Hearing the interrogatory, the footman stepped to the door, and bowing politely, assured her that the driver was right.

"But does Mlle. Célestine Delaunay live here?" enquired Rose, still incredulous.

"Certainly, Mees—Can I have de honor of announcing you." Whereupon he opened the door and assisted her to alight.

"Then Mlle. Delaunay is at home?" said Rose, hardly knowing whether to proceed or to return.

"Yes, Mees—she is just about to drive out.—But if Mees wishes to speak with her, I will enquire of the *femme de chambre* if Mlle. receives to-day."

This was the second time that day that Rose's preconceived notions had received a severe shock. However her mind was made up, and instructing Mary to wait for her in the cab, she followed the man up to the front-door, where she was received by a neatly dressed soubrette, and ushered into the boudoir which we have already described.

Rose was but slightly impressed by the florid magnificence of the apartment, but the contrast of the evidently wasteful luxury of its owner, —attested by the profusion of rare hot-house plants and bouquets whose perfume was almost overpowering, and the thousand useless and expensive knick-knacks strewn heedlessly about, with the squalid lodging she had pictured to herself,—was enough to take away her breath. And when her hand came in contact with the bank-note intended to loosen the tongue of her mysterious rival, the idea seemed so ludicrous, that notwithstanding her anxiety, she with difficulty, restrained herself from laughing aloud. Presently the maid-servant returned to say that Mlle. Célestine would be with her shortly, and gave admission to a pretty little silky-haired Maltese terrier, which after a mild preliminary bark of defiance, submitted to Rose's blandishments, and jumped into her lap.

She was still caressing and petting the tiny animal, when the door opened, admitting a beautiful woman, habited in the latest of Paris fashions, and muffled in costly furs.

"*Bon jour*, Mademoiselle—How do you do," said the lady, with a pleasing smile. "I see you have made friends with my little Beauty—Beauty that is her name—I like de English names."

"She really is a little beauty," replied Rose, choking down her first embarrassment, and striving to master the situation. "She seems to be very friendly and good-tempered too."

"Ah *passablement*! she is like her mistress—good friends with those she likes—but she can have her humours too—sometime."

Rose earnestly scanned the face of her rival, and a very formidable one she appeared.

Irregular, but pretty and mobile features, piercing black eyes, and a mass of tawny gold hair, added to the lithe and graceful figure, around which the fur mantle hung in shapely folds, formed a *tout ensemble* which Rose felt any man must admire.

Then there was a certain charm in the easy self-assurance of one accustomed to be admired, and accepting the homage of the million as her right.

Altogether Rose felt that in her resolve to

heard the lioness in her den, she had undertaken a very arduous task, and one requiring all her tact and courage.

Mlle. Célestine, if she observed her visitor's embarrassment, had the good taste not to show it, but continued to converse about 'Beauty,' and the weather, and other indifferent topics, although she had not the slightest notion who Miss Melville was, or what she wanted of her.

She was not much accustomed to ladies' society, but there was something about Rose which unmistakably bespoke the gentlewoman, and impressed her favourably, in spite of her prejudice against her own sex.

Rose, in her innocence, was not aware how much of the piquancy and charm of Mlle. Delaunay's appearance was due to art and her dress-maker, but viewing her as she appeared to her, young, beautiful, and wealthy, she felt like a man who has to cross swords for the first time with a professed duellist. What chance had she against this brilliant apparition? All Alfred's assertions about the actress's appearance in public, and her not too lofty ideal of art, were forgotten or discredited.

How could a woman who looked and lived apparently like a duchess, condescend to caper about in tights on a public stage?

Meanwhile she answered rather at random, and the conversation began to flag.

She was trying to think how best to introduce the object of her visit, but for the life of her, could not see where to commence.

At last Mlle. Célestine, remarking rather pointedly that her carriage had been waiting for some time, asked if she could offer her any refreshment, or do anything for her before she went. "You will excuse me, I know, Mees—pardon me, but I have forgot your name," she said in conclusion—"but I have arranged to meet my papa at Hyde Park."

Rose felt that the time had come for her to speak, or else to retire owning herself beaten. "Melville is my name," she said, "Rose Melville of Stoneheaton. I must apologise for detaining you, but I want so much to speak to you on a subject of the greatest importance."

"*Tiens!* Wat can that be? Sit down, Mees Melville—I do not remember to have met you before."

"It is not about myself, but about a friend of mine, a gentleman whom you know, or used to know intimately."

"*Parbleu!* I know so many!" replied Célestine laughing, and showing her pearly teeth. "Their name is legion—all *mauvais sujets*—all!"

"This one, Mr. Herbert Ashwood, I have been led to understand—"

"Wat! *ce cher* Herbert—is he a friend of you? Ah *le coquin*, he was very much *épris de moi*—how do you call it?—in love with me."

"Ah!" said Rose trying in vain to repress a quivering sigh. Then her worst suspicions were confirmed, he was faithless to one or the other!

"Do not trouble yourself for that, *ma chère*," continued the actress with an amused smile, lolling back in her chair, and crossing her legs. "It is all past now, and I can tell you, he is a *bon garçon*—and ever so rich."

Rose stood up with a look of disgust and horror—Did this woman mean to insult her, by her insolent familiarity—she turned deathly

pale, but she managed to control her voice as she replied: "I must apologise for having intruded upon you, but I was anxious to find out the truth for myself. I shall at once write to Mr. Ashwood, absolving him from his engagement towards myself, and informing him that, as far as I am concerned, he is quite at liberty to renew his relations—whatever they may have been, with you."

"*Petite jalouse!*" murmured Mlle. Célestine, more than half inclined to resent the tone and manner of these words. But catching sight of the unutterable misery in Rose's face, she felt a twinge of compassion, and rejoined: "Ah, Mademoiselle, it is not of me you have to complain,—if he has left you,—it is of himself. He is going to be married; he told me so himself. His relations with me were those of *bon camarade*—that is all—*parole d'honneur!*"

"But surely you know that it was to me he was engaged?" replied Rose, bewildered. "You must do,—since your father wrote to me about it."

"Papa—my papa write to you? *Jamais de la vie!* There must be some *malentendu*."

"Well, here is his letter," said Rose, producing it.

Célestine glanced through her father's epistle, and burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"*Oh, mon petit Papa! tu veux faire de l'intrigue, et sans me souffler mot, attends mon petit—je vais te fichier.*"—Here she suddenly pulled up, considering that she had, perhaps, overstepped the bounds of English decorum, and continued more seriously: "I ask your pardon, Mees Melville,—but the whole thing is such a muddle—a confusion. I did not know you was the fiancée of M. Herbert, and this letter of my papa is certainly one big *blague*. He was never—how do you say—engaged to me. I 'ave not seen him for two years—and when I say he was once *épris*—I mean he love me like any young man,—and good young men too,—love all pretty women, or pretty horses, or pretty dogs,—or, you know, anything that it is *à la mode*, to love!"

Rose could not fail to detect the ring of

genuine kindness, in this voluble and confused declamation. Sad and sick at heart as she was,—it touched her. She held out her hand to her late enemy, and said: "It is I who have to ask your forgiveness—I'm afraid I spoke very rudely just now. But you, who are accustomed to be worshipped by thousands, cannot imagine what Herbert's love is to me. Now I have seen you, I can quite understand and forgive his admiring you. But what I could not have forgiven, would be, that he should have laid himself out to win my affections, knowing all the time that he had no love to offer in return,—as your father's letter seems to suggest."

"That is all one *blague*, wat he say there," replied Célestine, who, having performed a good action, warmed towards her protégée, as she began to regard Rose. "I cannot think who can have—stay, yes, I can—*Je m'en souviens*—Mr. Ralph Ashwood, he came here a month, two month ago, and he asked me to write such a letter, to break off his cousin's engagement,—'for his own good,' he said. But I did not believe that, and refuse. And

so I suppose he persuade my papa to write that letter. *C'est un rude farceur*—Mons. Ralph!"

"You are sure it was Ralph Ashwood?" exclaimed Rose, to whom the whole affair now became clear.

"Certainly, I know him well, but do not like him, as formerly his cousin. It is a man without heart, and a dangerous enemy. I would recommend you to be in guard against him. From his manner, I fear he wishes you evil."

"How can I ever thank you for your kindness. You have lifted a load of care off my mind. You have behaved most nobly and generously!"

"*Allons donc!* Wat have I done? M. Herbert is my good friend, and you are my friend, and I like to help my friends. It is soon said."

"You have, indeed, been a friend to both of us, and I shall certainly tell Herbert when I write. But I must not detain you any longer. I suppose there is no need for me to answer your father's letter?"

"Leave papa to me. I will scold him for interfering in my affairs without my consent, and you will hear of him no more. He is a very good child, my little papa. He always do what I say."

"Good-bye, then, and thank you a thousand times, for not taking offence at my apparent boldness," said Rose, holding out her hand. "I hope I shall see you again some day. I hardly like to ask you to come and see me in the country,—it is so dull."

"Thank you, for your good thought. *Hélas!* no—we are not in the same *monde*—how do you say?" cried the actress, taking both her visitor's hands. Then with a sudden impulse of kindly feeling towards the pure and innocent girl, who had treated her as an equal and a friend, she drew her towards the window, saying: "It is better that you should not see me again, so let me take your portrait in my memory. Yes! Mons. Herbert has chosen well. You are a dear, charming girl, and I should like to embrace you before we part."

"With all my heart," said Rose, pressing a

hearty kiss on each of Mlle. Célestine's cheeks, at the risk, alas ! of damaging her lovely peach-like complexion.

Strange though it may seem, the actress had worked herself up into quite a state of emotional excitement over this interview, and there were genuine tears in her eyes, as she accompanied Rose to the door of her cab, and there bade her a final adieu.

CHAPTER V.

THERE is nothing takes the conceit out of a man so quickly, as being in love (mind ! we mean the 'genuine article,' not the sentimental partiality, veneered with a thin layer of honest admiration, which so often does duty for it !) as being in love then, we repeat,—and more particularly with a coquette !

Harry Irvine arrived from the continent brim-full of exalted notions of his own importance, his learning, and his handsome appearance ; and here, after a very few weeks' acquaintance with a little blue-eyed, innocent-looking imp of mischief, yclept Miss Effie Stanfield, he found himself in a pitiable state of doubt as to his own good looks, of contempt for his knowledge, and of despair at his social insignificance.

To some extent, doubtless, he benefitted by the change. But a total loss of self-assurance

is by no means desirable in the young, as confidence begets hope, and without the latter a man has no incentive to exertion.

Since the memorable interview in Miss Montgomery's garden, when Effie had, figuratively speaking, called him to the Bar (in the High Court of Love), he had contrived several meetings, at which he made the fullest use of his permission to plead his own cause, but with indifferent success.

Sometimes she would be 'coy and hard to please,' at others, cold and formal, and just when in despair he had taken heart of grace to break with her altogether, her mood would change, and with a softly whispered: "Harry, how cross you are!" and a pair of upturned lips which invited a caress, whilst chiding him for taking it,—the chains were quickly forged again, and he once more hugged himself in his 'Fool's Paradise'.

How long he might have gone on alternating between paroxysms of hope and despair, it is hard to say; for the little flirt, not being deeply in love herself, enjoyed the sport thoroughly.

There was something so delightful in eluding the watchful eye of Miss Prince, and in stealing out to meet her lover in the park, a sequestered corner of which was their general rendezvous. Then there was a certain spice of romance, in the arrangement by which Harry, after a preconcerted signal, came bounding over the palings, and folded her in his arms (when she would let him) like any Knight-errant or Troubadour of old. Last, but not least, was the charm of the new and hitherto undiscovered sense of power. It was so amusing to see a great strong grown-up man, like Harry, obey her slightest nod or beck,—to make him miserable with a frown, or enraptured with a half-spoken word of love.

Like a child with its first live pet, she tortured him from sheer heedlessness and curiosity. What made it harder for poor Harry was, that at the outset he had taken the shadow for substance, and believed that in her heart of hearts, she really loved him; whereas her real sentiments were a mixture of girlish sentimentality, gratified vanity, and

friendly regard, which might, or might not have grown into something deeper.

That Effie's behaviour was reprehensible no one can deny, and as for most of us, in our shortcomings, there was a Nemesis lying in wait for her.

The avenging goddess assumed in the first place, the dual form of Mrs. Tod Mountjoy and Miss Partridge.

These ladies happened to be strolling one afternoon, down an unfrequented lane which skirted Stoneheaton Park, when hearing voices on the other side of the palings, they paused to listen.

"What's that?" inquired the elder lady, whose ears were always on the alert.

"Some of the Stanfield's servants, I suppose, louting about and wasting their time," replied the charitable Miss Partridge.

"Gracious me—they are kissing!" exclaimed Mrs. Mountjoy, with a quiver of excitement.

"How horrible! Who can it be?" whispered the scandalised virgin. "Stay! here comes somebody! Step behind that tree, dear Mrs.

Mountjoy," she continued, as a scrambling noise was heard behind the fence.

Luckily for them, or unluckily for the lovers, Effie happened to be in an extra amiable frame of mind that day, and was according her lover more than his usual allowance of farewell embraces.

This delay just gave the agitated females time to ensconce themselves behind the trunks of two large elms, which grew in the lane, as Harry's head and shoulders appeared over the palings.

"It's all right!" he cried, raising himself up on his arms and dropping into the lane.

Even then, had he been wise, instant discovery might have been avoided. But he was loth to leave his lady-love in so sweet a mood. Who could tell how she would treat him on the morrow?

"Effie," he whispered, returning to the barrier which separated them. "Effie, my darling—one more kiss before I go—just one more."

"But I can't reach you."

"Stand on the old stump."

"There! Good-bye till to-morrow, dearest!"
And again their lips met, this time in full view of the two worst gossips of the place.

Then the young man once more dropped on his feet, and sped rapidly down the lane, whilst a rustling amongst the fallen leaves informed the eavesdroppers that Effie was returning towards the mansion.

Words would fail us, were we to attempt to paint the excitement and delight of Mrs. Tod Mountjoy and her companion, as they emerged from their concealment. We had thought of likening it to the ecstatic emotion of Columbus, when after weary weeks of sailing 'westward and ever westward,' he sighted the shores of the great continent; or of Aladdin when he found himself the possessor of the 'magic lamp'; but perhaps their sentiments assimilated more nearly to those of an enthusiastic M. F. H., who towards the close of a blank day, puts his hounds through a little spinney, or falls on the line of a travelling fox. Horses, hounds, and men, are listless and weary. Suddenly old 'Thunderer,' who is rarely at fault, gives tongue in his rich base notes.

What a change comes o'er the scene ! The rest of the pack run in—heads down, and sterns waving ; the steeds prick up their ears, and paw the ground eager for a gallop ; whilst the riders stand up in their stirrups, or fling away the ends of their cigars, to be ready for a burst.

Then, after a moment's hesitation, Thunderer speaks again,—this time, with more conviction. Lightfoot and Jolly-boy join the chorus. A keen old farmer views master Reynard's dusky form stealing away, some half-dozen fields ahead. The Master cheers on his hounds, and away they all stream merrily, followed by 'the Field,' eyes sparkling, and hearts beating with the ardour of the chase !

We do not mean to infer, that the melancholy widow and the prudish Adelina Partridge, attempted to jump the park palings, and follow in hot pursuit the girl whose secret they had unexpectedly lighted upon, and whom in their hearts they hated, as occupying a higher position in the social scale than themselves ; or still less that they dreamt of going at a hand-gallop down the lane on the ' line ' which Harry Irvine had taken.

No, for the moment they contented themselves with the knowledge, that it lay in their power to 'run into' and 'break up' their unconscious victims at any moment they might choose, and such knowledge was sweet.

After the first, 'Well I never! Did you ever in all your life? How disgusting! How unmaidenly,' &c., had been brought forth in spasmodic gasps, the two ladies indulged in an excited duo of probabilities and possibilities, which lasted till they were somewhat breathless and exhausted, when they adjourned to Mountjoy Cottage, to discuss their future course of conduct over a cup of tea.

It has already been hinted, that the bosom of the fair Adelina cherished a tender passion for that would-be reprobate, Mr. Tod Mountjoy, who had been nick-named the 'Widow's Mite,' by Archie and Effie Stanfield.

Possessing as he did, such a high opinion of his own value, and being accustomed to be made much of, in his small world, the little man was a very difficult bird to snare. Of this fact the doctor's daughter was well aware, and with a masterly generalship determined to

carry the war into the enemy's own country. Consequently she suddenly professed the deepest friendship for her near neighbour, Mrs. Tod Mountjoy, was in and out of her Cottage a dozen times a day, and became her constant companion in all her walks.

Did she contemplate ordering a new dress? ‘Dear Mrs. Mountjoy’ must give her the benefit of her opinion. Was an old bonnet to be furbished up after the latest fashion, and made to look like new? ‘Dear Mrs. Mountjoy’s’ exquisite taste was called into requisition to settle the important question of colour and trimmings. And then, if by accident the ‘Widow’s Mite’ strolled in and interrupted the ladies at their conference, the costume or bonnet would be coquettishly submitted for his approval.

“Men are after all the best judges of what a woman should wear, are they not, dear Mrs. Mountjoy?” Miss Partridge would murmur, with downcast eyes. “And then your wicked son has so many opportunities of studying the Paris fashions at their fountain-head.”

“In other words, the head of some reigning

beauty of the *demi-monde*!" the little man would reply, with an affected drawl. "It's no use your frowning at me, mother!—I don't profess to be a saint, and every man of the world knows—aye, and the great ladies too, that *these* are the women who set the fashions. Why, only last spring when I was at Paris—Blanche d'Antigny—"

"My darling Toddie! don't you see you are making poor Adelina blush?" exclaimed his mother, waving her mittened hands deprecatingly. "You really should remember that the doings of these—well ladies—are not suited for the ears of a pure and innocent English girl."

"All nonsense, mammy—girls are not such fools. They go to picture-galleries, and theatres when they have the chance, they read novels and society papers by the score, and when they get together, tell naughty stories amongst themselves—or they wouldn't be daughters of Eve. I flatter myself I know something about the sex, and I don't believe in their milk-and-water innocence, that is ashamed to talk about anything to a

man, beyond church and school, and tea fights."

"Ah Mr. Mountjoy—you have become cynical from seeing too much of the world! I should be sorry to believe that all girls were such as you describe, and I hope before long some one will convince you of your error!" cried Adelina, with a glow of enthusiasm. "I don't pretend to be better than most girls, and I don't deny that I admire a little naughtiness—just a very little—in a man. But one day you'll find out that modesty is woman's chiefest ornament—won't he, dear Mrs. Mountjoy?"

Of course the widow assented, although she must have known that the fair preacher was warily laying her toils for her son; whilst the little man, chuckling with delight at his superior knowledge of the world's wickedness, and his courage in thus airing it before the women-folk, withdrew; not without a feeling of satisfaction at the evident fascination, as irresistible as it was secret, which he exercised over the champion of Virtue.

It so happened, that at the time of their

important discovery, Sir John Stanfield was at Stoneheaton—parliament being in recess—and the question arose, how and when the knowledge of his daughter's scandalous behaviour should be imparted to him, or whether in the first instance it should be communicated to his wife.

"Poor Lady Stanfield! It will be a sad blow to her. Her only daughter keeping assignations in the park with a young man—like any scullery-maid!" observed the widow, with ill-concealed triumph. "She'll hardly hold her head up so high after it. Though that won't be any harm—She's much too proud and stand-offish to my taste."

"So she is to mine! cried Miss Partridge. "Only the other day she cut me in the street, although I'm sure she must have seen me. Do you know, dear Mrs. Mountjoy, I think it will be better to write direct to Sir John. A mother's weakness might tempt her to hush up the scandal, and keep the news from her husband. That young Irvine wants taking down a peg or two, as well as Miss Effie."

"Well, my dear, Sir John is just the man to

do it for him. I fancy I see his face when he hears of it!"

Now, apart from the natural desire innate in the hearts of these ladies, to set the Stanfield household by the ears, one very important cause existed why Miss Partridge should wish for the discomfiture of Harry Irvine.

As already stated he had announced his intention of setting up as a medical practitioner, and was commonly supposed to be contemplating Stoneheaton as the field for his labours.

If this project were carried out, the prestige which the young man would enjoy from his foreign studies, and recent attendance at the London hospitals, added to his personal popularity in the neighbourhood where his father was so well known and respected, would, as Dr. Partridge had openly explained to his daughter, cause a considerable diminution of his income, and—*pro tanto*—of hers.

Thus, there was no thought of mercy, or of 'doing as she would be done by,' in Adelina's breast.

The only question was, how to deal the

blow with most crushing effect. And this end, the two conspirators came to the conclusion, would be best attained, by getting Dr. Partridge, who was in attendance on the baronet for an attack of gout, to break the portentous news to him at the earliest opportunity.

Meanwhile, Harry, in happy unconsciousness of the thunderbolt that was about to break over him, returned home, filled with joyful anticipations of the morrow.

Effie had arranged to drive over to Dingley in the afternoon, and they had settled between them, that Harry should be accidentally passing, and call in to pay his respects to Miss Montgomery, by which means he hoped to enjoy the felicity of escorting his inamorata home.

Since the memorable occasion of the burglary, when he had first made the acquaintance of Effie's aunt, the young man had taken care to avail himself of her permission to consider himself enrolled on her visiting list, and lost no opportunity of ingratiating himself in the favour of the kind, but crotchety old lady.

Blind as he was to the dictates of common-sense and prudence—to put the matter in no worse a light—in carrying on a secret liaison with the only daughter of the proudest and most prejudiced man in the county, he could not but feel that a time must come, when he would have need of all the intercessors who could be found to say a word in his favour.

He lacked the courage to go straight to Sir John, to boldly plead his passion and his belief that it was returned, and then abide by the consequences. And indeed it would have required a man of very strong will and purpose to take this step, situated as he was.

Even had he wished to do so, Effie's fiat stood in the way.

"What is the use," she cried, "of making a bother, and turning everything topsy-turvy? I'm in no hurry to get married, in fact, I'm not sure that I shall ever marry at all! But if I *do*, Harry," she continued softly, by way of applying a salve to the wound she had just inflicted, "If I do—you know who will have the honour of leading the lovely and accomplished bride to the altar, &c. &c.—At any

rate, you know as much as I mean to tell you. So be a good boy, and don't talk nonsense, and try to look less like a funeral—and above all take your arm away from my waist, Sir!—Funerals don't do that sort of thing,—nor good young men."

In vain Harry pleaded that he was neither a funeral nor a good young man, but that he loved her dearly, and wanted to be assured of her love in return. The little puss was obdurate—If he was not satisfied with their relations as they were,—he was quite at liberty to break them off—Indeed she thought it would be better for both of them that they should say 'good-bye'—and so forth, till poor Harry was nearly driven to desperation.

Nor would she listen to his entreaties that she would allow him to confide their engagement to his parents and to Miss Montgomery.

"I feel sure that the dear old lady would help us—At any rate she would not betray our secret, Effie, and it would be so jolly to be able to meet you here, openly," he said, as they were strolling together in Miss Montgomery's

garden after tea, having met there ‘accidentally’ as arranged.

“No, Harry, I tell you I won’t have it—I’m not going to be lectured and scolded for nothing—Now, don’t be offended. I shouldn’t run all this risk for *everybody*, I can tell you—I do like you, Harry—though you are a nasty, proud, cross thing. But just listen to reason—Aunt Hilda *might* tell, although there is no love lost between Papa and her—Your father would be sure to tell, as a matter of conscience, and your dear mother, bless her!—couldn’t keep a secret five minutes to save her life. Besides, who says we are engaged?—I’m sure I never gave you permission to say so—”

“Well then, I think it’s quite time that you—or somebody else *should*!” sounded in their astonished ears, from the other side of the laurels and evergreens, which separated the shrubbery-walk, down which they were strolling, from the lawn and flower garden.

They had left the old lady, as they thought, comfortably settled indoors; whereas she had been tempted by the warm autumnal evening to ensconce herself in her favourite seat on the

lawn, under the shelter of the shrubs and bushes which formed the walk. In the warmth of the discussion, the lovers had omitted to turn, or even to lower their voices, as they approached the house, and Miss Montgomery, sitting within a few yards of where they stood, had over-heard the whole of the conversation just recorded !

CHAPTER VI.

READER, can you picture to yourself the feelings of the king of the forest, when, after a successful chase, a slinking jackal invites himself to a share of his feast ; or of a London flunkey, when he is requested to take coals into the schoolroom ; or of the captain of a Rhine steam-boat, on being offered a glass of beer by a would-be sociable and condescending British tourist ?

Because if you can, and will take the trouble to add these outraged dignities together, and multiply the sum by a naturally choleric disposition and an attack of gout, you will get a fair notion of Sir John Stanfield's sensations, on being made aware of the proceedings of Harry Irvine, with his daughter.

So violent was his indignation, that Dr. Partridge, who had considered it more prudent to make the communication orally, rather than

to commit himself to pen and paper, feared an attack of apoplexy might ensue.

After a glare of incredulous surprise, the irate baronet became purple in the face, and positively gasped for breath. Then suddenly, forgetful of his gouty toe, up he started, and poured forth a volley of oaths and abuse, which would have done credit to Fielding's 'Squire Weston,' and which caused the prim little doctor to shrink into his voluminous white cravat.

"My dear Sir John, pray be calm. Don't over-excite yourself, I beg,—after all, no great harm has been done," he murmured in his most dulcet tones.

"No harm been done, Sir! What do you mean by saying no harm has been done? Is it nothing that my child's name should be dragged through the mire by a penniless young vagabond like that? Damme, Sir—it will be the talk of the whole place, and ruin her prospects for life. But I'll break every bone in his body, I'll horse-whip him within an inch of his life!"

"I think you must have misconstrued my meaning, Sir John—of course, it is a piece of

unparalleled impertinence on his part, and he deserves severe reprobation. But as far as my information goes, there is no need to resort to desperate remedies. I know of no law against an ordinary flirtation, and now that you are on your guard, it lies in your hands to put a stop to it, unless of course you see fit to acquiesce in the young man's suit — "

"Acquiesce in his grandmother! I'll drive him out of the place, bag and baggage!" thundered the baronet, still beside himself with passion. "You must be mad, Doctor, to dream of such a thing."

"Very well, Sir John, if these are all the thanks I am to get for my trouble, I will wish you a very good-day," replied the little man, nettled in his turn. "I didn't mean to recommend such a course. My only wish was to avoid a public scandal, for your sake, and your daughter's."

"Well, Doctor, and what do you advise? You know a man with the gout isn't answerable for all his words, and so gross an insult would ruin the temper of a saint," said Sir John, by way of apology.

"The provocation is doubtless great, but you should not confound the innocent with the guilty. If my daughter were led into an escapade of the sort, I should admonish her severely, and give the young man—who I am sure in this case is most to blame—to understand, that unless he wished for unpleasant consequences, he would do well to quit the neighbourhood at once."

"Hum! But supposing he declines to go?"

"In your case I should bring my influence to bear upon his father."

"And if that fails?"

"I should take my daughter away abroad—anywhere—so as to prevent all communication between them. 'Out of sight, out of mind,' is a very wise saw."

"You may be right, Doctor, but I don't like the idea of the young scamp getting off scot-free."

"Ah, my dear Sir John, unfortunately the days are past when men in your position could wreak summary vengeance on their enemies. In these Radical and Revolutionary times,

'Jack's as good as his master,' and soon will be better."

"Not whilst I am alive, not whilst I have a seat in the House and a voice to raise against the dismemberment of our Constitution! No Sir, the Stanfields from time immemorial have been Tories, staunch supporters of the Crown and the Church. We may be shorn of our seigniorial rights, but allow me to tell you, Sir, that families like ours are the true bulwarks of the Kingdom, the true bulwarks of the Kingdom, Sir!"

This was no news to Dr. Partridge, who had heard the same story fifty times before, at electioneering meetings, farmers' dinners, and in fact whenever Sir John could get an audience. But he listened with wrapt attention and bowed his head in mute approval, as his patron mounted on the high horse, and forgetting his previous wrath, entered into a long dissertation on statecraft in general, and the services of the Stanfield family in particular.

It was rather tedious, no doubt, but as the little doctor charged his visits by time, he

solaced himself with the thought that it would go towards lengthening his bill, whilst it undoubtedly relieved his patient's mind, and helped to restore his equanimity.

At length, however, he pulled out his watch, and cutting the baronet short in the middle of one of his most rounded periods, pleaded a pressing consultation as an excuse for leaving him.

It did not suit the doctor's book that in the enthusiasm of political discussion, Sir John should lose sight of his wrath against Harry Irvine, which he had come on purpose to rouse.

He had preached moderation, because he knew that threats of personal violence were futile, and would only end in making their intended victim a martyr and a hero ;—whereas the little man intended that he should be driven from the place, or at any rate subjected to social ostracism.

Dr. Partridge was not a particularly good doctor, or clever man, but he traded on his irreproachable professional *tenue*, and clothed his ignorance in pompous verbiage, and the

assumption of knowledge. For all his suavity of manner, he was as vain and self-conceited as Sir John himself, and never forgot or forgave the slightest insult, real or fancied, offered to his personal dignity, although he could not always afford to resent it at the time.

He cherished an almost childish spite against Harry Irvine, and was quite as delighted as his daughter and her 'dear Mrs. Mountjoy' at the opportunity of getting him into trouble.

Whilst making his adieux, he took care to recall the subject to Sir John's mind, by begging him not to act hastily, or to divulge the name of his informant.

"If you will allow me to advise you, Sir John," he said in conclusion, "you will feign ignorance for a few days, during which time you will doubtless find an opportunity of catching our young friend in '*flagrante delicto*'."

By the best of us, advice is rarely accepted with much gratitude, and to a man of Sir John Stanfield's temperament, it was as gall and wormwood. Even when he condescended to ask for an opinion, it was with no intention of

acting up to it. In fact, it generally had the effect of driving him to a course of action diametrically opposed.

Thus, no sooner had Dr. Partridge taken his departure, than he rang the bell violently, and ordered the domestic to inform Miss Stanfield that she was wanted in the library immediately.

Effie was no coward, and perhaps stood less in awe of her father than any one else in the house. Still, the solemnity and suddenness of the summons came upon her like a clap of thunder. The more so, that since the discovery by her aunt on the previous afternoon, of her relations with Harry Irvine, she had been seriously pondering on Miss Montgomery's earnest entreaty, that the engagement should be submitted for her parents' approval, or else unconditionally broken off.

The old lady had been kinder, and more considerate, than either she or Harry had dared to hope. She had even gone so far as to acknowledge a certain partiality for the young man, and to offer her services, for what they might be worth, towards inducing Lady

Stanfield to lend a favourable ear to his suit.

"As for your father, my dear," she said, "you know, as well as I do, that anything I could say, would be quite sufficient to ruin your cause ; and I shall certainly not demean myself by trying the experiment. At the same time, you, as his daughter, and Mr. Irvine, as a gentleman, owe it to him and to yourselves, that he should be informed of your intentions. Unless I am much mistaken, you will have a hard struggle, but you may console yourselves with the reflection, that we most prize the things we have had some trouble to attain."

Effie had promised to think the matter over, and was to meet her lover that very afternoon, in order to acquaint him with her decision.

Serious consideration of any subject was so foreign to her butterfly nature that she found it no easy matter to concentrate her thoughts on the issue before her.

She liked Harry very much, and thoroughly enjoyed the existing arrangement, by which he did all the petting and pleading, and she

the teasing;—but to enter into a solemn engagement, whereby she would be bound never to try the effect of her charms on any one else—to become a staid and solemn matron, before even she had properly ‘come out,’ and seen the World with its excitements and allurements, seemed almost too dreadful.

It was in this frame of mind that she obeyed her father’s summons, and had Sir John possessed one particle of tact, or displayed ever so little affection and sympathy whilst pointing out the undesirability of such a match, in all probability Harry’s fate, which already hung in the adverse balance, would have been sealed there and then.

But the master of Stanfield Court was a bully by nature, and although, being a staunch Churchman, he was probably convinced that ‘a soft answer turneth away wrath,’ it was with the mental proviso, that he should be the questioner; and he entirely overlooked the self-evident converse, that ‘a soft question’ is more likely to bring ‘a soft answer’ than a harsh one.

Accordingly he began in a loud voice, “Effie,

what is all this nonsense between you and young Irvine?"

"What nonsense, Papa?" she asked, diplomatically parrying his question with another.

"Don't bandy words with me, child! I ask you, is it, or is it not true, that you have been carrying on, or allowing him to carry on, a ridiculous flirtation; making yourself, and me, the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood?"

"I don't know who has been your informant, Papa, but whoever it is, he or she is a nasty mischief-maker, and does not tell the truth," replied Miss Effie, still on the defensive.

"Then I suppose you mean to say that Dr. Partridge is a liar,—and Mrs. Tod Mountjoy and Miss Partridge, who saw you kissing and making fools of yourselves over the Park palings?"

This was an awkward thrust, because utterly unexpected, but the little puss, true to the instincts of her sex, was not going to own herself in the wrong if she could help it, and tried the effect of a counter.

"Of course, if you choose to believe a pack

of meddlesome old women before your own child, I have nothing more to say.”

“Effie, you will finish by making me angry,” replied her father, who was already at fever-heat, and roaring like one of the bulls of Bashan. “As I said before, I don’t want to argue the question, but you will please to understand that I insist upon this affair being broken off at once—At once mind, and for good.”

“Come now, dear, be a nice kind good-tempered Papa, and your little Effie will tell you all about it. I meant—at least Harry meant—to let you know—only—we hadn’t time. He—that’s Harry—loves me dearly, and I like him, and he wants your consent to our engagement. Do give it, dear, like a nice old darling.”

“Leave me alone, Effie—go away. I don’t want you hanging about me, treading on my toes. I tell you I am not going to be cajoled into any such preposterous arrangement, with an impudent young jackanapes who deserves a good horsewhipping for his impertinence!”

“Harry is none of the bad names you choose

to call him, but a dear, nice fellow," replied Effie, waxing indignant. "At any rate he loves me, which is more than you do—it seems, or you wouldn't be so cruel!"

"I love you, and respect myself too much to consent to see the family name degraded by such a union. The Stanfields came over with the Conqueror, and where were the Irvines then, I should like to know?" said Sir John, striving to be calm and dignified.

"Pretty much where you and I were, Papa, I expect—An agglomeration of atoms or proto-plasms; or possibly even in an advanced stage of Baboondom, though hardly free from their caudal appendages,—according to those horrid books I read with Miss Prince."

"Hold your tongue, Miss, or if you can't behave yourself better—go to your room," roared her father, scandalised to the last degree by such levity.

"I'm sorry if I have offended you, Papa dear,—I only said it for a joke. Please don't be angry—But seriously, Harry's father is a clergyman, and a gentleman, and surely—"

"I tell you I won't argue the question—

You will obey my wishes or take the consequences. Once for all—I refuse my consent."

"But Papa—"

"Leave the room, and don't let me hear that young scoundrel's name again, or I'll lock you up, or send you to boarding school, or—"

The remainder of his threats were lost upon his rebellious daughter, who, feeling she could no longer restrain her tears, and not wishing to break down in face of the enemy, darted out of the room, and sought her own chamber, where she indulged in the unusual luxury of a good cry.

Spoilt child as she was, and accustomed to have her own way in everything, the first effects of her father's stern determination, were surprise and anger, mingled with mortified vanity.

The idea of dutiful submission never entered her mind. No, her father had chosen to disregard her feelings, and had thrown down the gauntlet. She would let him know that she was not to be bullied into obedience.

As a natural sequence, her affection for Harry appeared stronger and more real than it had

ever done before. Hitherto she had been playing at love; but now the community of their trouble bound her to him by a warmer tie, and she regarded the idea of being parted from him for ever, as an unendurable misery.

On the spur of the moment, she rushed impetuously to her secretaire, and choking down her sobs, began to indite her first love-letter.

After the usual hesitation incidental to the occasion, as to the terms in which he should be addressed, she arrived at the determination to 'burn her boats,' and wrote as follows:—

"DEAREST HARRY,

"That horrid Dr. Partridge and those two old busy-bodies, Mrs. Mountjoy and the doctor's lovely daughter, have told Papa about us, and he is VERY angry! But never you mind, I will *never* give you up, and *never* love *anybody* but *you*. I will try and meet you at the usual place this evening, but if I don't come, you will know it is because I *can't*. Don't take any steps towards seeing or writing

to Papa till you hear from me, and above all don't forget to love your poor heart-broken little sweetheart,

"EFFIE."

Having carefully sealed this epistle, Miss Effie stole cautiously down-stairs and into the garden, where she gave it to one of the under-gardeners, with strict orders to deliver it at once into young Mr. Irvine's own hands.

Having thus eased her mind, she re-entered the house in a more placid state, and was met on the stairs by her mother, who appeared strongly agitated, and linking her arm through Effie's, drew her into her boudoir.

"What's the matter, mammy dear?" asked Effie, noticing signs of tears on her mother's face. "What has poor little mother been crying about?"

"Effie, my child, how can you ask? Your father has told me all, and blamed me for your misconduct, most cruelly and unjustly. O my darling, how could you do it!"

"There's no great crime in falling in love, is there, mother? Else how is it that you, and

all the respectable married people we know, aren't ashamed of themselves?"

"You forget, my dear, the difference in your station and position. The Stanfields ——"

"Now, don't you go spouting Papa at second-hand, there's a dear. I'm sick of the Stanfields, and their station and position. I wish they'd all been killed at the Battle of Hastings, or choked with Lampreys, or drowned in the Channel, or something ——"

"Effie!"

"I can't help being slangy, mamma, when I have the wretched family pride tied round my neck like a mill-stone! Why shouldn't I love Harry, if I can't help it?"

This was rather 'a poser' for Lady Stanfield, whose forte was not logic. So truly feminine (not to say Irish) an argument, commended itself to her mind, and appeared unanswerable. Still she had the memory of Sir John's furious invective, and peremptory commands before her, so she made reply:

"But your father will never consent. He threatens to lock you up, or send you abroad, if you do not obey him. My darling, think

of your poor mother's sufferings, if she were to lose you."

Unconsciously she had tapped the soft place in Effie's armour, and her defiant child flung herself into her arms, crying: "Ah, mammy dear, why didn't you come to me an hour ago? I couldn't bear to lose *you*. But I've written to Harry and given him my word, and I can't withdraw it now, even if I wished. There's nothing for it, but for you and me to put our heads together, and bully or persuade Papa into giving his consent. It can't be so very difficult. Surely two women are more than a match for one man."

"You don't know your father, my dear," was Lady Stanfield's reply, accompanied by a mournful shake of the head.

She had not lived in bondage for upwards of a quarter of a century to dream of raising the standard of revolt now, even in the sacred cause of her daughter.

However, she was willing to engage in any amount of secret plotting on her darling's behalf, and tried to conjure up all kind of imaginary and impossible circumstances

which might lead Sir John to revoke his decision.

The luncheon-bell interrupted their conversation, and as Effie declined to go down after what had happened, Lady Stanfield had to excuse her as best she might, and bear the brunt of her husband's ill-humour.

When the servants had withdrawn, Sir John returned to the charge, and after stating his intention of complaining to the Rector of his son's misconduct, he informed his wife that, until he had decided what course he should pursue, he must beg her to keep a strict supervision over her daughter's movements.

"I need hardly inform you," he said in conclusion, "that I am quite determined that no further communication shall take place between them, and shall hold you responsible if my wishes are in any way disregarded."

Poor Lady Stanfield! Between an imperious husband, and an obstinate and self-willed daughter, her's was by no means a path of roses.

She had to employ all her powers of persuasion to induce Miss Effie to forego her

assignation with Harry, and still more, to extract a promise that she would neither write nor see him again without her knowledge.

Meanwhile, Harry, on receipt of Effie's first effusion, had gone straight to his father's study, and made a clean breast of it.

The Rector was somewhat perplexed and annoyed, but did not treat the matter in a very serious light. He too had his pride, and felt that the coolness existing between the two families might raise obstacles to what he would otherwise have considered a perfectly suitable match. True, there was a disparity of fortune, but what was that, compared to the happiness of the two young people.

“The main question is, Harry, my boy,—is the little puss capable of such lasting affection and esteem, as alone make a life-long union desirable? All the rest I regard as matters of detail. But you will have to buckle to, and carve out a reputation and a fortune for yourself, as no man should be dependent upon his wife.”

“I'd rather she hadn't a penny in the world. And as to her affection, how can I

doubt it after such a letter?" cried Harry, warmly.

"You must be the best judge of that, and if you are thoroughly convinced that the dear child is in earnest, and knows her own mind, I offer you my sincere congratulations. She is a dear fascinating little creature, and I should be proud to have her as a daughter. Only you must remember—'*Varium et mutabile semper femina!*'"

"You forget, Sir, that *Litera scripta manet*," said his son, not to be out-quoted, triumphantly waving Effie's effusion.

"Ah, but my dear boy, that doesn't apply in your case. I have the greatest respect and admiration for the other sex, but to think that any amount of promises spoken or written, would be binding on a pretty wayward child like Effie, is to build on the sand. The only safe foundation in a woman, is her heart!"

"What steps do you advise me to take with regard to Sir John?" asked Harry, who regarded all this advice as superfluous.

"Write and ask him to grant you an interview,—or if you don't fancy the job, I'll do so

myself. It may be the opportunity of leading to a reconciliation in other matters," said the Rector, quite pleased with the notion. "Meanwhile I must see what I shall be likely to be able to spare you, as I suppose I shall have to go prepared with the promise of some fixed income. And you, my boy, must seriously devote your mind to finding or making a practice."

During the mid-day meal, Harry informed his mother and Lucy of his engagement, and was assailed by a perfect hurricane of congratulations, questions and banter, in which it is scarcely needful to state that Mrs. Irvine took the leading part. As for quiet retiring Lucy, for all her book-wormishness, she had had all along a shrewd suspicion of which way matters were tending. She therefore felt it unnecessary to express any surprise, and contented herself with saying: "Oh Harry, I'm so glad it's all settled".

Whereupon her mother turned upon her, declaring that such cold-bloodedness and absence of all proper feminine curiosity were quite too aggravating, and wound up by expressing

serious doubts as to Lucy being a true daughter of hers—an assertion which caused much merriment to the Rector and Harry.

CHAPTER VII.

IT is sometimes customary during the progress of certain Operas to introduce between the acts, some kind of Ballet divertisement, as a sort of interlude and to mark the division of the plot or story.

Although perhaps it is against the strict canons of novel-writing, we purpose availing ourselves of an author's undoubted right to tell his own story in his own way, and having arrived at the turning-point in the existence of several of the characters who have been figuring on our little stage, to shift the scene, and ask our Reader to mount on the wings of his imagination, and accompany us in a flight of some five or six thousand miles southwards.

The curtain, then, has been down for the customary fifteen minutes, during which time we trust the audience has refreshed itself with a cup of fragrant Mocha (which at our House, —unlike most,—is really compounded of the

genuine article) or cigarette, or mild flirtation, according as its tastes are bibacious, fumiferous or amorous. And now, the bell has sounded, the orchestra has played the overture, and our interlude, which is neither saltatory nor musical, commences.

* * * * *

Two sportsmen in pith-helmets, and costumes befitting a semi-tropical climate, have made their mid-day halt beside the bed of a river. We say, 'the bed' advisedly, because the river, which only exists in the rainy season, has dwindled down to half-a-dozen tiny streamlets, which wind their tortuous way, diverted—here, by a bank of sand—there, by a rock or stone—sometimes far apart—at others, close together, but nowhere too wide for a man to step across.

Hot and unrefreshing as the water looks, it is the source of life to such vegetation as has sufficient pertinacity to dream of existing in these baking regions. Here and there, under the partial shade of some huge mass of rock, slipped or washed down from the range of stony hills from whence the river takes its rise, grows a tangled thicket of flowering shrubs and

dwarf trees. Pelargoniums, oleanders, prickly-pears, small palms, and various species of the beautiful mimosa are huddled together for mutual shade and protection. Underneath, long feathery grasses—which draw their sustenance from the moisture absorbed by the roots of the trees and shrubs—form a miniature jungle, pleasanter to look upon than to sit in, for they swarm with insect life, and not a few of them are armed with prickly tines, or blades, keen as a razor.

Wild convolvuli twist and twine round the stems, and hang in gay festoons from the branches of the trees, and sugar-birds flit noiselessly from shrub to shrub, each sparkling like some jewelled toy, as the glint of sunshine lights up its tiny wings or touches its gilded throat.

Away from the hills and the river, far as the eye can reach, a sandy desert-waste, undulating like a swell in the South Atlantic; dry, arid and devoid of verdure—dotted here and there with patches of sand-covered scrub and heaps of loose stones, looking like broken blisters on the scorched surface of the plain.

Dull, unbroken, monotonous, Silence reigns supreme, save when some strong-winged hook-beaked bird of prey, wakes from his noon-tide siesta in his rocky fastness, and spying a long-legged stork or crane, lazily meditating on one leg, in the water below, utters a shriek of defiance, and flutters upwards on murderous intent; or a sleeping antelope is roused from his lair by the stealthy undulations of some bright-eyed cobra, and bounds up like a flash of lightning, seeking safety in flight.

The pervading drowsiness of the scene,—to say nothing of a shade temperature of some 105 degrees Fahrenheit, and that of the sun, an unknown quantity,—appears to have affected our sportsmen.

Both are stretched at full length in the shadiest spot they can find, in one of these little oases of verdure. Using their saddles for pillows, regardless of insect-pests, both are apparently wrapped in the deepest slumber. A few yards off, two tethered horses and a Kaffir attendant, are imitating, as best they may, the example set by their masters.

The carcasses of two or three bucks and a

few ill-assorted brace of birds of different descriptions, descending from a gigantic turkey-buzzard to a tiny snipe, guarded by a sleepy retriever, whose sense of duty compels him to sleep with one eye open, denotes how our travellers have spent their morning. Whilst the open saddle-bags and canteens, and fragmentary portions of a meal still lying about, remove all doubts as to the reasonableness of the siesta in which they are indulging.

As they lie there, in the attitude (and beatitude) of repose, their figures appear to their best advantage. Two strong healthy young men as one would see in a day's march anywhere else, and in a good many marches in this South African desert. Both are bronzed by the sun, till their faces and hands appear almost black, but whilst the clear-cut features of the taller of the two, are set off by a long dark moustache;—from beneath the helmet, placed slant-wise across the face of his companion, with a view to keeping off the flies, appears a flowing auburn beard; and the little rim of neck which shows below the line of his collar, is the skin of a fair-complexioned

man. By-and-by an industrious ant, not a small imposter like his English cousin, but a great horny-looking individual with a pair of formidable probosces, having poised himself dexterously on the extreme end of an overhanging branch, drops plop! on to the nose of the dark sportsman, and promptly inserts his aggressive weapon.

"Damn the flies!" growls Ralph Ashwood, (for he it is) starting up, and banging wildly about him.

The insect, either disgusted at such rough treatment, or horrified by the profane language, prudently 'makes tracks,' leaving Ralph wrathful and wide awake.

After one or two expansive yawns and stretches, he brushes the insect colony,—which has commenced prospecting operations on this new species of animal,—off his garments, and stands up.

As he does so, his eyes light on the still recumbent form of his cousin, and an evil fire flashes from them. Instinctively he stoops for the rifle lying at his feet.

"If this were to go off by accident now, in

your direction, I wonder where you would be, my fine fellow!" he mutters to himself. "Dead men tell no tales, and yet the fool lies snoring there within three yards of his deadliest enemy.—When he received his letters last night, and heard from Rose of the Chevalier's abortive attempt, he flushed as red as a turkey-cock, and could hardly trust himself to speak.—He'd better have held his tongue, or taken himself altogether out of my reach, after calling me a sneak and a coward! Never mind, my young friend! Ralph Ashwood will be even with you yet. You'll find he's not the man to be smoothed down with a few soft words—He's got too many wrongs to avenge—and avenged they shall be!"

The speaker's face is distorted with hate and vindictiveness—one of those paroxysms of passion to which he has always been subject is upon him,—and Herbert's life hangs by a thread! He toys with the murderous weapon, brings it to his shoulder, covers the unconscious sleeper—lowers it, and again brings it into position.

"Bah! why should I scruple to shoot him

like a dog?—I gave him fair warning and offered to meet him with or without weapons, and he refused point-blank—Told me I was 'off my head,'—'stark staring mad,'—and yet has the folly to trust himself to my tender mercies like this! —"

Just then one of the horses moved, and set the dog barking.

Ralph started, and moved in the direction of their Kaffir guide.

"I'll get this fellow out of the way, at any rate," he muttered, and then proceeded to direct the man to return to their encampment (some seven or eight miles distant), with the horses and their bag of game, explaining that he and his cousin would work their way back to the waggon on foot.

The Kaffir grinned acquiescence and began to make preparations for his departure. When it came to saddling Herbert's horse he discovered that the saddle was still in use, and made signs enquiring whether he should disturb him or not.

Ralph motioned in the affirmative, and the native began to withdraw the improvised

pillow by almost imperceptible little jerks and pulls, until the sleeper's head rested on the ground.

Then, and not till then, did Herbert, who was of an exceptionally drowsy nature, open his eyes and grunt out: "What's up?"

"I'm sending the horses back," said Ralph,—"We can stay here till it's cooler and you're awake, and then walk back over the hill."

"Right you are," replied his cousin. "It's no good moving yet in this infernal heat," and as he spoke his eyes closed again, and he resumed his interrupted slumbers.

"Take the dog with you," ordered Ralph, as the servant was moving off, riding one horse and leading the other.

But Lion refused to leave his master, and Ralph had to catch him and put a cord through his collar, the ends of which the Kaffir made fast to one of the saddles—before he could be induced to go.

Then Ralph lighted a pipe, and sat down beside his companion, watching him like a cat does a mouse.

He puffed so fiercely that the pipe soon required replenishing.

Wild, mad thoughts ran through his brain, yet still he sat and smoked as though his life depended on it.

Presently Herbert awoke and roused himself.

"What time is it? Past four o'clock—By Jove, I've given you a turn of waiting," he cried—"It's very good of you to have let me sleep so long—I was regularly dead beat—I didn't get much sleep last night."

"After our row," he was going to add, but checked himself—Perhaps it was better to let bygones be bygones.

"When you're ready, we may as well take a beat up the hill and down the other side. It's the nearest way to the camp," said Ralph, buckling on his cartridge belt, and shouldering his rifle. "I'll warrant we shall have some sport."

Herbert looked curiously at his cousin. These were almost the first words he had addressed to him that day.

Without doubt they had had a serious

quarrel on the previous evening. A Kaffir runner, who had been left at the nearest village to await the arrival of the post-cart, had brought a budget of letters, amongst others one from Rose in which she complained of Ralph's intended deception and perfidy.

Herbert was surprised and pained beyond measure at the disclosure, and had the intelligence come from any other source would not have credited it. But Rose herself vouched for the truth of it, and in the heat of the moment, he spoke his mind out freely—too freely perhaps, knowing the character of the man he had to deal with.

Ralph had retorted with a violent outburst of passion, and ended by offering to submit their quarrel to the arbitrament of the god of battles, and fight a duel there and then à l'outrance.

His wild manner, and still wilder proposal immediately sobered the young man.

He was no coward, but the idea of fighting a duel in this savage manner with a near relative, his sole companion in the African wilds, savoured more of the frenzy of a mad-

man than the proposition of a sane Englishman in the nineteenth century.

"Good God—Ralph, we don't want to stain our hands with murder!" he cried.—"At any rate, I don't mean to. Perhaps we have been both too hasty, and if I have said more than I ought—I'm sorry. 'Forgive and forget' is a very good rule, and I vote we both turn in and sleep it off. If you don't revert to the subject I'm sure I shan't—so good-night," whereupon—Ralph making no response—he had retired to his sleeping compartment.

Their present shooting excursion having been pre-arranged, guide and horses were ready at an early hour the following morning. Herbert had passed a restless and uncomfortable night. The disclosure, and the scene which ensued, opened an unpleasant vista of possibilities for the future, and gave him an insight into the lower depths of his cousin's character, of whose existence he had hitherto no knowledge.

However, to his easy-going good-natured temperament, it was a moral impossibility to harbour malice, or live long at variance with

those around him ; so he determined to carry out existing arrangements, as though nothing had happened.

Not so, Ralph, who declined his proffered hand, and only replied to his morning greeting with a surly : "Are you coming ? Remember I advise you not to !" and then lapsed into a sullen and dogged silence which had lasted all the morning.

Side by side the cousins commenced to ascend the hill, whose barren and rocky sides offered neither shade nor shelter, but only seemed to radiate the floods of heat poured from the great ball of molten fire now dipping towards the West. Still, as they rose higher above the plain, a faint fitful breeze betokening the approaching sunset, fanned their streaming brows.

Herbert stopped to drink in the welcome harbinger of evening and comparative coolness, and noticed, for the first time, that the dog was not following them.

"What's become of Lion ?" he enquired.

"I sent him back to the waggon," replied Ralph—"These sharp, hot rocks would only

have made him foot-sore—Besides we don't want him here, we're not likely to get anything but a snap-shot at a buck, or a rock-rabbit."

"Isn't it rather a weary grind over these hills for nothing?" said Herbert, lazily.

"I didn't ask you to come. The guide told me it would save three or four miles in point of distance, and I want to get a shot at an eagle or one of those big vultures." So saying his companion resumed the ascent, and led the way, scrambling over rocks and loose stones, to a narrow plateau or ledge on one side of a gloomy kloof (or cleft) in the hill-side.

Here he halted, and waited for Herbert to come up, unslinging his rifle and peering into the dark cavernous holes on either side, apparently in search of game.

"What have you got there?" whispered Herbert, arriving breathless. "It's a likely place for a tiger-cat."

"It's a very good place for my purpose," replied Ralph, with a bitter laugh, "and that is to settle our quarrel."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. Only one of us leaves this spot alive! Don't waste your breath in arguing—my mind is made up—I *hate* you, Herbert Ashwood—you have blasted my life—you have robbed me of my love, you have called me a coward, and the world is not big enough to hold the two of us!"

"Ralph, you must be mad!" exclaimed his cousin, horror-struck at the fiendish malignity depicted in the speaker's face, and taking a step backwards.

"If you attempt to escape, I'll shoot you like a dog," roared Ralph, frenzied with hate and passion. "I have once offered you satisfaction as a gentleman. I now repeat my offer. We can stand at ten paces and draw lots who fires first. There's a grave ready dug at our feet, and I swear by all the powers of darkness—that if you don't send me there—I will you."

"You may murder me if you like, but nothing shall induce me to raise my gun against you," said Herbert, more than ever convinced that he had to do with a lunatic. "You're not well, Ralph. The heat has been

too much for you. You know that I have never wittingly done you a wrong in my life—"

"It's false. But even if it were true, I hate you none the less. You have stood in my way from the day you were born. And now my time has come. If you won't fight like a man—I'll fling you over," so saying, Ralph threw down his rifle, and advanced to carry out his threat.

Herbert took a rapid glance over the side of the abyss not three feet off, and shuddered at the thought of a hand-to-hand struggle. Yet it appeared inevitable. Escape was impossible, and he could not make up his mind to fire on a madman.

He tried one more appeal. "For God's sake, Ralph—for the sake of old times—"

"For the sake of old times!—You couldn't have invoked a worse auxiliary!" cried Ralph, with a bitter sneer, seizing him round the waist. "Over you go—for the sake of old times and Rose Melville!"

Her name, and the thought, that it was not only his own life that he had to defend, called

forth Herbert's natural courage and energy in face of real danger, and grasping his antagonist firmly by the throat and arm, he nerved himself for the struggle.

Surprise, and a natural horror at being locked in deadly embrace with one whom he had always regarded as a friend, and even now persisted in deeming subjected to a temporary aberration of intellect, prevented him from at first exerting his full strength, but when he felt himself being dragged nearer and nearer, inch by inch, to the fatal precipice, the intoxication of battle and the inherent clinging of human nature to life, spurred him to more vigorous efforts.

Although his antagonist had the advantage in height, Herbert, whose life had been spent in outdoor exercises and sports, was really in better training, and the stronger man of the two.

Still he had the disadvantage of acting only on the defensive, whilst Ralph, incited by bitter hate, was armed with the nervous energy of a madman.

Backwards and forwards they rolled in

deadly conflict,—now tumbling against the wall of rock on the one side,—now struggling on the brink of the gorge, according as one or the other obtained the upper hand.

More than once they were within an ace of rolling over together, but Herbert, by a frantic effort, managed to regain his balance, and fling himself and his adversary backwards—away from the dizzy height.

Both men were breathing heavily, their eyes blood-shot and staring, their strength beginning to fail.

Herbert watched his opportunity, and putting out all his strength, managed to throw his cousin heavily, and disengage himself from his clasp.

"Now, I think we've had enough," he cried. "For God's sake, Ralph, let us make peace, and have done with this folly."

But no answer passed his cousin's lips. He lay there prone on his back, like a dead man.

A sudden shock passed through Herbert's mind, "What if he had killed him?"

He was standing with his back towards the precipice, and within two feet of the edge.

He bent over his cousin to listen for his breathing, and as he did so, turned and glanced over his shoulder to make sure that his footing was safe.

At that fatal moment, Ralph opened his eyes, and seeing his adversary unprepared made a sudden lurch against his legs, and before he could recover his balance, pushed him violently backwards over the abyss.

* * * * *

A cry of horror, echoed by the surrounding rocks and caverns. The sound of a heavy body falling and striking the projecting ledges as it fell—taking fresh impetus from each impact.—Then a dull thud, all but drowned in the fiend-like screams of the colony of vultures and other birds of prey disturbed by the unwonted commotion,—followed after a while by a silence as of the grave.

* * * * *

Ralph, bruised and breathless, sat for some minutes like one in a dream, then dragged himself to the edge of the precipice, and craning over, gazed eagerly downwards.

Amidst the piles of rocks, forming myriads of holes and caverns, wrapped in perpetual gloom, he could not discover the mangled form he sought after with greedy eyes.

Then he bent his ear, but no sound of human voice broke the fearsome hush, succeeding the flight of the winged denizens of the gorge.

"At last!" he cried in a tone of exultant fierceness. "At last, I am revenged! Fortune, power, all that I have thirsted for these many years, are mine.—And Rose Melville shall be mine too before the year is out!"

So saying, he picked up his gun, arranged his disordered dress, and after a pull at his brandy-flask, slowly made his way over the mountain in the direction of the camp, without one thought of pity or regret for the companion he had so ruthlessly slain, and whose body he left to be interred in the voracious maws of the vultures, tiger-cats, or jackals.

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CHAPTER VIII.

TRUE to his promise, the Rector called one morning at Stanfield Court to consult Sir John with reference to Harry's engagement.

As it happened, Sir John was very anxious to see him on the same subject, and had been hesitating for the past few days as to whether it would be more dignified to call at the Rectory in person, or send a note requesting an interview with Mr. Irvine.

Thus the visit came very opportunely, as relieving the baronet from the embarrassment of making the first overtures, after declaring that he would have no further intercourse with his rebellious protégé, and the Rector was promptly ushered into the library, where he found the master of the house reclining in an easy chair, propped up with cushions.

"I am an unfortunate martyr to my old enemy, the gout, so you must please excuse

my rising," said Sir John, with an air of pompous condescension, as his visitor entered the room, and then purposely overlooking the Rector's out-stretched hand, gracefully motioned him to a seat, and relapsed into a dignified silence.

"I am sorry to hear it, Sir John, and had I known you were an invalid, I should not have intruded myself upon you," replied the other, not best pleased at this icy reception.

"Don't mention it, I beg. In fact I was rather wanting to see you myself."—

"About Harry and your dear daughter? Of course, you have heard of their doings! Ah, well! young people will be young people, and fall in love and commit all sorts of youthful follies. Eh, Sir John? Though I must say in my son's justification, that Miss Effie is possessed of charms to win the admiration of any youth with eyes in his head, and a heart to dispose of."

"You are very good ——"

"Not at all. The dear child is a great favourite of mine, and no mere words can do her justice. Still I felt that as in the eyes of

the world, your daughter might look higher than the son of a country parson, I ought to ascertain your feelings on the subject, and if necessary put in a good word on behalf of the young people, who I am sure are devotedly attached."

"Well, Mr. Irvine, I consider that you have only acted with proper decorum in so doing. And I am glad to hear from your own lips, that you regard this match as an absurdity."

"I didn't say so, Sir John, nor do I think so, although ——"

"Excuse me! There is no reason to argue on the other side of the question. I am sensible of the honour your son deigns to offer to Miss Stanfield, but in her name and my own, I must beg most distinctly to decline it."

"But, my dear Sir, your daughter's happiness is concerned, as well as my son's, and surely this consideration should outweigh any mere conventional differences of rank and fortune. It is true, as I said before, that your daughter might have made a more brilliant match, but on the other hand, Harry is clever,

and has the chance of rising in his profession, whilst I am prepared to settle ——"

"Pray spare yourself and me the trouble of going into further details, my mind is made up, and I shall not depart from my word."

"It is very hard upon the young people," urged the Rector, striving for their sakes to keep his temper, which was sorely tried by the baronet's superciliousness.

"Of that you must allow me to be the best judge. At any rate, hard or not, my decision is unalterable, and I must beg that you will acquaint your son with the same, and intimate to him that any further advances on his part will be most distasteful to me."

"Not more so than they will be to me, I can assure you, Sir John Stanfield. It is not my custom (nor, I hope, that of any of my family) to intrude myself where I am not welcome. Had it not been for the affection I have always entertained for your daughter, my veto would have been as promptly pronounced as yours."

"But, my good sir," replied the baronet, somewhat staggered at the vigour and dignity

of the retort, "you must surely see that the disparity of rank and fortune renders the thing impossible—out of the question."

"I have always entertained the belief that a gentleman—the son of a gentleman, and though I say it, one of unsullied honour—might aspire to the hand of any lady, however high her station or fortune, provided he was in a position not to be dependent upon her, and regarded her money rather as a fortuitous responsibility than an adjunct to her attractions. And that any girl so placed, who was forced to do violence to her deepest affections, and reject the man she loved, for a suitor of superior wealth or position, was an object for commiseration; whilst those who forced her to sell herself for gold, were guilty of an act of—well, perhaps I had better withhold the epithet, under present circumstances."

"What do you mean, sir?" thundered the baronet.

"You are an invalid, Sir John, and I, a man of peace. Probably my notions are antiquated and disused amongst the aristocracy of the present day, so I will 'spare you and myself

the trouble of going into further details,' and wish you a good morning." With these words the Rector, whose flashing eyes and heightened colour belied his peaceful assertions, stalked out of the room, leaving his adversary to digest his last biting sarcasm as best as he might.

In his way, Harry's father was every inch as proud as the master of Stanfield Court, and he spoke the truth in declaring that he by no means coveted the honour of an alliance between the two families.

Still, he deplored the coolness and estrangement which had arisen of late years, and had gone prepared to hold out the right hand of fellowship to his old friend.

"And this is how I am requited," he muttered to himself as he crossed the hall. "I wish for once we were both school-boys again, that I might show him what I think of his ridiculous assumption."

Possibly the good Rector may have had some convincing argument in his mind, which it was beneath his dignity as a man to adduce. But there was an ominous clenching of his

fists, which, with all due diffidence, be it said, was highly suggestive of a hankering after the *argumentum ad hominem*, as practised at schools, and which is known to prevail where more logical reasoning has failed.

A light touch on his arm caused him to turn, just as he reached the vestibule, and Effie's silvery voice, for once reduced to a whisper, asked anxiously:—

"Dear Mr. Irvine, have you seen Papa, and what does he say?"

"Nothing very pleasant, my love. Nothing that I can talk about here."

"Won't you come up-stairs? Mother would like to see you."

"I'm afraid I cannot. I'm in a hurry to get home," he said, considerately substituting 'home,' for 'out of the house'.

"Then I will walk down the Park with you," cried Effie, casting a nervous glance at the library windows. "I must hear what has happened."

"Don't think me rude or unkind, my dear, but under the circumstances I would really rather you shouldn't."

"It's bad news, then! O, Mr. Irvine, don't you turn against me."

"My poor darling, your father will explain all. God bless you, my dear child, and try to bear a brave heart," said Mr. Irvine, tearing himself away. He was so moved by his favourite's tears, that he felt if he remained, his stern resolutions to behave like a Spartan father would vanish, and he might be induced to abdicate the high position he had taken up.

As he walked rapidly down the drive he met Dr. Partridge's carriage, and was greeted by the little man with a sarcastic smile and wave of the hand, which in no wise tended to allay his perturbed spirit. However, by the time he had reached the Rectory he had walked off some of his vexation; and an urgent note from Rose Melville, which was waiting his return, requesting him to call round at once to see her father, completely dissipated his annoyance at what he could not but regard as an unwarrantable slight.

It was rather a relief to the Rector to find that Harry had walked over to Dingley and had not yet returned, for he felt that his

embassy had been an unmitigated failure, and he did not fancy the task of breaking the bad news to him.

“Women manage these matters best,” he remarked to his wife, “and you can let the poor boy down as gently as you like. Only, if he should come in before my return, mind you make him understand there is no prospect of gaining Sir John’s consent. It would be mistaken kindness to encourage delusive hopes.”

“I don’t know, my dear, what Harry will do,” replied Mrs. Irvine, quivering with excitement, “but I know that if *I* were a man, and loved a charming girl, I wouldn’t take one ‘No,’—nor twenty, for an answer from a stuck-up bundle of pomposity like Sir John! I’d give him fair warning that if he didn’t give me his daughter, I’d take her!”

“It’s lucky your children are not here, to listen to such piratical doctrines,” laughed the Rector. “I agree with you in thinking that Sir John has not treated us nicely, but he is strictly within his rights, and if Harry follows my advice, he will not attempt to force himself

on a family so evidently indisposed to receive him."

"That's just like you men, so proud and cold-blooded and matter-of-fact! If Effie is the girl I take her for, she won't give Harry up quite so easily as her father thinks. I hav'n't patience with him, the nasty, mean, selfish brute!"

"Well, my love, I can't stay now to argue the question. Poor Rose is in trouble about her father, who it seems is in very low spirits again. She thinks it is about this new speculation of his, and wants me to go and try to comfort or advise him, as he will not confide in her. So I shall just drop in to lunch, and stay to have a chat with him afterwards."

"Poor Charlie—He is all ups and downs. I expect that young scapegrace Alfred has been leading him astray. Well, give my love to Rosie, and tell her that if I can be of any use I will come up and see her at once. The last time or two I have been to see her father he has been so pettish and snappish that I vowed I wouldn't go again till he sent for me, but that needn't prevent her coming here."

"All right, my dear—Good-bye," cried the Rector, half-way to the gate, where he stopped to return his wife's parting salutation, and then directed his steps towards the Manor House.

We must now return to Sir John Stanfield, whom we left in a state of high exasperation at the Rector's audacity.

Gout has the reputation for trying the sweetest of tempers, and when it fixes its iron-grip upon a man of Sir John's ill-governed disposition, it goes a good way towards driving him into a lunatic asylum.

In fact, when the doctor arrived, he found his patient literally foaming at the mouth, and it was with difficulty that he could persuade him to master his passion so as to give a coherent account of what had happened.

Of course the little man was respectfully sympathetic, and kept on wondering 'how a man in Mr. Irvine's position should presume, &c., &c.,' until his conciliatory conversation had exorcised the demon of wrath and outraged dignity, rampant in his client's bosom. Then he addressed himself to suggesting as a means

of avoiding a repetition of the annoyance, a tour to the German Spas.

"You see, Sir John, this plan will have the double advantage of—I hope—restoring your health, and of removing Miss Effie from the pernicious influences of this young upstart. You will find Baden very pleasant for the next few weeks, and as the winter advances you could run down to the Riviera, or on to Rome and Naples."

For a wonder, Sir John expressed himself pleased at the suggestion, and even went so far as to say that he should carry it out at once.

"I hate this place in the winter, now that I can no longer ride to hounds, or shoot. Parliament does not reassemble until February, so we have plenty of time for a nice little tour, in which I may be able to pick up some ideas on foreign modes of government which will be of use to our Cabinet. They sadly want a useful hint as to the best means of curbing the rampant spirit of Radicalism of the present day, and these things are managed much better on the Continent."

"You must not forget though, Sir John,

that we want rest—rest and quietude,” said Dr. Partridge. “Nor let your commendable zeal for the public welfare interfere with the restoration of your own health.”

“Ah, we public men cannot consider ourselves! Lookers-on see the most of the game—That’s why I always refuse office. It is of immense service to an administration to have the opinions and advice of a strong ex-officio member,” replied Sir John, who imagined himself a very important factor in the Government because he was occasionally invited to meet the Prime Minister at dinner, and had a nodding acquaintance with the rest of the Treasury Bench.

The upshot of this conversation was, that before the doctor left, Sir John wrote off to town to secure the services of a courier, and Lady Stanfield was summoned down to be informed of her lord’s intention of shutting up the house and starting for the Continent within a week.

She was so accustomed to Sir John’s displays of autocratic authority that she never even dreamt now of expressing an opinion on

his decisions, still less of hoping to influence them in any way.

For herself, she hardly knew whether she was glad or sorry at the proposed change, but the question which occupied her mind during her husband's peroration (a repetition of that already delivered to Dr. Partridge) was, what would Effie say to it?

As we know, that self-willed young lady was already on the verge of open insubordination to the paternal authority, and her mother trembled lest she might take this opportunity of asserting her determination not to be parted from her lover.

Happily however for Lady Stanfield, Miss Effie received the intimation with the utmost enthusiasm. She had never been out of her own country, and the thought of foreign travel, of visiting Paris, Baden, Nice, Rome, Naples—all the places she had read about in her geography-books and novels, filled her mind with a childish delight which quite put poor Harry and his sufferings into the shade.

"Oh, mamma, how awfully jolly! When are we going to start?—I say, mammy dear, you

must let me go up to London to order some travelling costumes—or we might go together," she cried, clapping her hands for joy, and romping about like a kitten. "To spend the whole winter, did you say?—Oh, it will be fun! You must take your court dress, dear, and get one for me, for we are sure to be asked out wherever we stay any time, aren't we, now?"

Lady Stanfield smiled assent, and wisely forbore to remind her excited daughter, that Harry Irvine might not view the expedition through the same rose-coloured spectacles.

Her Ladyship had not made up her mind (she rarely did on any subject) whether she wished her daughter's engagement to be carried through, or broken off. She liked what she had seen of Harry, and judging from her own barren and unsympathetic existence, was inclined to think a true love-match the only means of securing wedded happiness. Following up this train of thought, she had worked out a charming little romance, in which after a period of pining and enforced separation, her tears and entreaties added to Effie's, would overcome Sir John's objections,

and the young people appear in the interesting character of 'doves in a cottage'.

Hazy and improbable as the notion was, she had thought and dreamt about it, until it had fixed itself in her mind as an inevitable reality, and she had shed secret and sentimental tears over the picture of poor Effie torn from her lover, and withering visibly like a flower deprived of sun and air.

It was therefore something of a shock to find the supposed victim ready to be exiled, and thinking more of her dresses than her lover, at a moment which should have been one of supreme anguish. It didn't augur well for the *dénouement* of her romance. For unless his daughter were on the point of death, Sir John could hardly be expected to revoke his decision; and there was scarcely room for the display of the sublime heights of maternal devotion, which according to a scene already many times rehearsed, was to culminate in the words:—'Take my life if you will, but save Effie—my child—my only daughter!'

Like most people, Lady Stanfield was more sentimental in theory than in practice, and

readily consoled herself for any secret disappointment she might have felt at her daughter's want of intensity, by the thought that it saved a great deal of trouble.

Before many minutes had elapsed, however, that versatile young lady, Miss Effie, flew off at a tangent, thereby forcing her long-suffering mother to execute mentally another change of front.

There was a rise in the prospects of 'Romantic misery,' and a corresponding depression in 'Peace and quietude'.

"I say, mammy, my going away doesn't mean that I'm going to give Harry up. And I shall see him before I go and tell him so, poor boy."

"But my dear child, your father will never —"

"Know,—if *you* don't tell him—as I'm sure you won't—like a dear old thing that you are!" interrupted Effie caressingly. "I can just send him a line to say I am going to call at Aunt Hilda's to-morrow afternoon, and who's to prevent him taking a walk over to Dingley?"

"But the proprieties, Effie!"

"Bother them! Well, if you like it better, I'll write to Lucy, and you can drive over to say good-bye to your sister and take me with you, without shocking that terrible old female Mrs. Grundy—*née* Tod Mountjoy."

"Of course, if I didn't know that you were going to meet Mr. Irvine, there could be no harm in that. And I don't know it for certain, do I?" urged Lady Stanfield casuistically. "But I don't like the idea of your running after the young men like that."

"If you don't run after them, they'll run after you! It's the way of the world, so that's all settled, dear. Now you mustn't look, I'm going to write to Lucy." And suiting the action to the word, the spoilt child dashed off a few lines, nominally to her friend,—in reality to her lover, whilst Lady Stanfield resumed her novel with a sigh.

CHAPTER IX.

“O UNCLE HENRY, I’m so glad you’re come!” cried Rose Melville, as the Rector entered the pretty morning-room which she appropriated as her sanctum. “I’m sadly afraid there’s something wrong with those horrid mines. Father is terribly low and irritable, and Alfred hasn’t written home for more than a fortnight.”

“Where is your father, my dear?” enquired Mr. Irvine. “I’ll go and see if I can be of any assistance, although mining shares are not much in my line.”

“He is in the library poring over the Stock Exchange lists. How I wish that place had never been invented! It seems to bring nothing but trouble.”

“You shouldn’t worry your little head about such matters, my dear, though I agree with you, speculation is a curse to the country, and

best left alone by people who don't understand its mysteries. You are not looking very well. Any news from Africa?"

"Nothing by the last mail, although Herbert promised to write: I shall be glad when he is safely back!"

"Ah, I see you're like the rest of your sex! Mope and pine till Mr. Right appears. Then when he is secured, you treat him cavalierly and do your best to drive him away. Once he is gone,—more moping and pining until he comes back again!"

"Uncle! you horrid libellous creature! You know I sent Herbert away for his own good."

"Of course you did, my dear. I never knew a girl maltreat her lover, but for his own good, or because he deserved it. It's as it should be, I suppose. Your aunt led me a terrible life before we were married, but she's settled down into a model wife, and you'll do the same."

"I've a good mind not to ask you to stay to lunch after your rude remarks," laughed Rose, shaking her finger threateningly. "However, as I want you to see Papa, I suppose I must swallow my wrath."

“And I your luncheon,” replied the Rector, gaily, as he followed his niece into the dining-room, where they found Mr. Melville pacing impatiently up and down. He expressed no surprise at seeing his visitor, and after bidding him a hasty good-morning, seated himself at the table, and began to eat and drink with feverish haste.

Mr. Irvine tried to engage his brother-in-law in conversation on ordinary topics, but finding his efforts vain, he addressed himself to Rose. But do what they would, they could not impart either animation or gaiety to the meal.

The presence of anyone suffering pain, whether mental or bodily, acts as an effectual damper to conversation, and in this case, there was the additional dread of some impending calamity.

As soon as her duties of hostess would permit, Rose quitted the table and left the gentlemen to themselves.

A somewhat embarrassed silence ensued, and the Rector was still pondering on the best method of inviting his brother-in-law's confi-

dence without appearing to intrude, when the butler entered with a telegram for his master.

Mr. Melville seized it with trembling hands, and tearing open the cover, read its contents with evident dismay.

"No answer," he said, in a hoarse tone, to the servant, who bowed and left the room. Then scanning once more the piece of paper in his hand, exclaimed: "Good God, what will become of us!" and sank back in his chair with a groan.

"What is it, Charles? Can't I help you?" asked Mr. Irvine.

"Here, read it for yourself," replied the other, pushing the telegram towards him. "It's from Hopwood, Alfred's friend, in reply to my enquiry as to whether Alfred is in town, and has carried out my instructions, sent a week ago, to sell all my 'Rubies'."

The Rector picked up the message, which ran thus:—

"Have not seen Alfred for ten days. Thought he was with you. Rubies down to eight. Slow sale at that."

"H'm!" he said, "I don't make much of it.

Alfred and Rubies seem to be a good deal mixed up. Stop a bit. I think I can solve the enigma. Instead of getting rid of your mining shares, the young scamp has got rid of himself."

"Merciful heaven! You don't mean to say you think he has done himself an injury—made away with himself?" exclaimed Mr. Melville, greatly agitated.

"Nothing was further from my thoughts or the probabilities," replied the Rector, "and I am sorry you should have so construed my words. If you want my candid opinion, it is that Master Alfred has got into some scrape, and is keeping out of the way of his friends for a while."

"But it's downright wicked of him to desert me at a critical moment like this! Everything depended upon taking the market at the right moment. Three weeks ago I could have realised a large fortune, but by his advice I held on. Even a week ago I could have got out of it without loss. Then fearing the many damaging reports about the concern must be true, I wired him to sell out. That he has

not done so, is evident from Hopwood's telegram."

"Is it too late now?"

"You see what he says. I paid as much as twenty for some of my shares, and I believe I hold five hundred."

"H'm. It doesn't look nice."

"It looks like a certain loss of five thousand pounds, which in the present state of my affairs means—Ruin!"

"Let's hope it won't be so bad as that. Any way it's bad enough, and I'm heartily sorry for you. But, my dear Charles, whatever induced you to enter on a speculation of this sort? I've no wish to pry into your affairs, but it seems to me from your own showing, that it was little short of madness, particularly trusting matters of such moment to a young fellow with so little moral ballast—forgive me if I speak openly—as your graceless son—and my nephew."

"Don't spare me," groaned Mr. Melville.

"You can't think more hardly of me, than I do of myself and that unlucky boy."

"Well, what do you think to do? Some

immediate decision must be arrived at, and Alfred must be found."

"I wish you could advise me. My poor wits have utterly deserted me. If I sell out and get clear of the concern, I have no means of making good the deficiency without utterly crippling my resources. If I don't sell, the shares may go up again, but they may fall even lower. Whatever I do, ruin stares me in the face."

"Who is this Mr. Hopwood? Have you any dependence on him?"

"He is a stock-broker, a friend of Alfred's and the Ashwoods'. That's nearly all I know about him, except that he has visited here occasionally."

"It's a pity young Ashwood isn't at home now! Well, I think if I were you I would see this Mr. Hopwood, and be guided to some extent by his advice. I daresay he knows the ins and outs of such matters better than you or I."

"The idea is not a bad one. But how is it to be carried out? He will hardly care to come all this distance to see me, and in the

present state of my health, I don't feel capable of the exertion and excitement of a journey to London," said Mr. Melville, helplessly.

The Rector considered a minute and then said: "There are two or three matters which require my presence in town, and if I can make arrangements to get away to-morrow or the next day—for this matter of yours, I take it, requires instant attention—I might see Mr. Hopwood on your behalf, and try to gain some tidings of Alfred."

Like all weak natures, Mr. Melville was only too glad to shift his responsibilities on to anybody else's shoulders; and so before they parted it was arranged that he should write to Hopwood by that night's post, to prepare him for the Rector's visit, and informing him that his brother-in-law was fully empowered to act on his behalf.

The news that Sir John Stanfield had utterly rejected his suit, was a great blow to poor Harry, who was genuinely in love with the little blue-eyed charmer, and fancied,—like we all do under similar circumstances for a more or less lengthy period,—that on her

possession rested his life's future happiness or misery. True, the force of it was somewhat deadened by the message conveyed to him through Lucy, which his fond mother took care to administer immediately after the bad tidings, 'like a spoonful of jam after a morning powder' as she playfully remarked. Mrs. Irvine was a little woman with a great spirit and tenacity of purpose. She had unbounded faith in her own power to set everybody and everything right, and as, like many of her sex, nothing could convince her that she was ever worsted in argument or in the wrong, it was a merciful thing that the respect and love for her husband and the cares of her household, restrained her administrative efforts within moderate bounds, or the whole parish might have been 'set by the ears'.

This was a case, however, which roused the 'sleeping lion' within her. Sir John's conduct throughout, had been open to the severest censure, but that, to the offence of treating her husband cavalierly, he should add that of a dire and open insult to her Harry—her only

son—was more than the mother's philosophy could bear.

"I'll never forgive you, Harry, if you give her up," she cried, in the wildest excitement. "You *must* marry her now, whatever happens—if only to spite that wicked man. I declare, he ought to be hung—only that would be too good for such a wretch!"

"I don't mean to give her up, mother—If she'll still have me," replied Harry, somewhat dolefully, for not being of his mother's mercurial temperament, and having also, as a male, experienced some of the world's buffetings, he was aware of the vast interval between saying 'I must' and 'I will,' and the fact of obtaining one's desires.

"*Have* you? Of course she'll have you, if you insist upon it. Girls like a masterful lover, if it's only for the opportunity of falling out with him occasionally, and kissing and making it up afterwards. I don't approve of clandestine marriages, but I think this is a case in which you would be quite justified in marrying her without her father's consent—if he persists in his refusal."

"What would the Governor say to it?"

"Oh—he'd feel it his duty to be very much vexed and shocked for a while, doubtless—But Effie would soon bring him round—He couldn't resist her for long."

"Well, I'll sound her on the subject. But I doubt whether I should be justified in cutting her adrift from her family—even if she consented. Just think what people would say of me!"

"O you men! you men! you are so terribly calculating and prosaic. No wonder romance and heroism are things of the past!"

"You ought to blame the introduction of newspapers and police-magistrates. There isn't much romance in being hauled up before the Beak, and figuring as the principal actor in a leader on the 'Latest scandal in high life'—of all the provincial penny-a-liners."

The controversy was brought to a close by the entrance of the Rector, before whom Mrs. Irvine did not care to ventilate her extreme doctrines. As a matter of fact, in urging them upon her son, the little woman was convinced that they would not influence him seriously,

whilst they acted as a safety-valve for her excited feelings.

The news that her husband was going up to town on the following day, diverted her thoughts temporarily into a fresh channel, the more so that at Mr. Melville's request the Rector refrained from making a clear statement as to the object of his visit, merely saying in a manner which precluded further questioning, that he was going 'on a matter of business'. A term, which as Mrs. Irvine afterwards remarked to Lucy: "those aggravating men were so fond of using, and which was really a polite way of telling you to hold your tongue".

Little as she relished having her natural curiosity thus left ungratified, she knew her husband too well, to attempt to extort further information for the present, and so devoted her mind like a good wife to packing his bag, and seeing after his wraps and comforts for the journey.

Meanwhile she consoled herself with the reflection that she could call at the Manor House during her husband's absence, and learn

from Rose whether her suspicions were correct, and his visit of that afternoon had anything to do with this sudden departure.

CHAPTER X.

ARE forebodings mere phantasms of the mind, or the result of a nervous depression and an over-taxed brain? Is it entirely fortuitous, that on the very day we are pervaded with a feeling of impending misfortune, the blow sometimes falls?

Of course it may be advanced that, as with the Oracles of old, the coincidences are noted and carefully handed down, whilst the many prophetic failures are readily forgotten; or—that as coming events generally cast some sort of shadow before them, it may easily happen, that the mind is imbued with the dread of something which has actually taken place while we were yet thinking of it.

Your strong-minded, common-sensed persons pooh-pooh the notion of supernatural warnings, or prevision of any kind. Indigestion, sleeplessness, or a wet day, are sufficient explanations

for them, of any spiritual manifestations ; and perhaps, according to their lights, they are right.

On the other hand, History teems with instances of visions which have become actualities, and most persons of keen susceptibilities have undergone similar experiences, not to be accounted for by the matter-of-fact theory.

After all, what are we—what is our boasted knowledge, that we should pretend to judge what or where, is the verge of possibility ? Even the lower animals have their instinctive warnings of storms and danger, and seek refuge long before the sensual organs can be cognisant of their approach. And why not nature's most complex and delicate organism—Man ?

Be this as it may, certain it is, that Rose Melville rising after a restless and unrefreshing night, and drawing aside her curtains to gaze on the gloomy outlook of a raw cold November morning, was seized with a dismal presentiment which she found it impossible to shake off, of evil befalling or already befallen her distant lover.

In vain she told herself that her father's

failing health and monetary troubles, and her brother's continued silence, were of themselves sufficient to cause depression of spirits, which the wretched weather but served to increase. In vain she forced herself to remember that the Cape Mail was due that very day, and although she had not heard from Herbert by the last, this one was sure to bring her news.

"News—Ah! but there is *bad*—as well as good!" she shudderingly ejaculated. And then—an unusual proceeding for her—she crept back to her bed, trembling in every limb, in the vain hope that she might fall asleep and forget her terrible forebodings.

Cause enough for anxiety she had indeed, in the state of her home affairs—but Rose was a brave girl and had long made up her mind to look the worst in the face, and do her utmost to sustain and comfort her father. But an impending and unknown danger—unknown but not unfelt—makes cowards of the bravest.

At a late hour, finding that her young mistress did not appear at the breakfast-table, Mary tapped at her door to enquire if she would take the meal in her room.

"Master's having his in bed, Miss—and the best place too, this beastly weather! It's snowing and sleeting like anything, and you'd better let me light you a bit of fire to dress by, or you'll be perished with cold."

"Thank you, Mary—I'm not feeling very well this morning, and I thought I would try to get an hour's sleep, but it's no use," said Rose, wearily. "How is Papa this morning—Has he had a good night?"

"Very bad, Miss, I believe—James brought down word that he's going to stop between the sheets a bit. By-the-by, there's one bit of good news for you, Miss—a letter from Africa."

"O quick, Mary! Why didn't you bring it with you?" cried Rose, starting up.

"Well! it were addressed to Master, Miss, and I don't think it's Mr. Herbert's handwriting. But it's come from him, for the post-mark's Cape Town."

"Run down at once, there's a good girl, and tell James to ask my father if he will let me have it as soon as he has done with it."

"Very good, Miss," replied Mary, disappearing promptly.

Meanwhile, Rose made preparations for rising, but seemed as though spell-bound in her bed.

"A letter from Africa—for her father—not in Herbert's handwriting! The girl must have been mistaken. How should she know whose writing it was?—Or, perhaps,"—a sudden terror shot through her heart, and made her gasp for breath—"How absurd!—Why should she imagine he was ill—or.—He might have been too lazy or too tired—a hundred things might have prevented his writing. Of course! What more likely than that being in a hurry to catch the mail, he should have got Ralph, or somebody else to direct the envelope?"

In the energy of her desire to force this belief upon her anxious and reluctant mind, Rose found herself grasping the bed-clothes with the clutch of a drowning person, and this mechanical action seemed to break the lethargic spell under which she had sunk.

"Of course—of course!—What a fool I am for my pains!" she murmured aloud—and then essayed a laugh. But this was not a success. The hollowness of the sound—and worst of all, the self-conscious hollowness of

the pretence, startled her—even more than her wild and distraught appearance did her maid, who at the moment re-entered the room.

"Please Miss, master sends his love, and he doesn't feel up to reading his letters just yet—till after he's had his breakfast and an hour's rest. So he's sent 'em all up to you, and you can open which you like," said Mary, presenting a plate on which lay half-a-dozen missives.

A stock-broker's list, a couple of bills, a letter in Mr. Irvine's handwriting—she tossed them all aside, and seized the one with the foreign stamps and post-marks.

It was from Ralph ! Again she found herself asking, Why-why? Again the same clutching sensation at her heart—the same longing and the same dread of knowing—the worst.

"It ain't bad news, I hope, Miss?" enquired Mary, with the interest, which is not familiarity, in a personal attendant of long standing.

Rose started, and almost blushed, at being found guilty of a weakness she had often laughed at in others—to sit gazing at the outside of a letter, speculating on its contents, when to open it and read is so easy.

Ah ! but is it ?—not always. When life or death hang in the balance, who but is glad of a momentary reprieve—if even but that of prolonged uncertainty ?

With an effort she broke the seal, and read,—or rather the words seemed to engrave themselves on her mind in letters of fire.

For the moment she was—like the Seer—caught out of herself—all sense of personality and presentness had vanished, sensibility even seemed dulled. It was as though she were some one else, reading intelligence of people in whose doings she had no interest or part.

And yet through it all—though her eyes shed no tears, she had a vague sort of pity for herself and for the other—like a child sorrowing over the woes of the heroine of its fairy-tale.

There was not much of the fairy-tale in the composition before her, except its untruthfulness. The letter was couched in Ralph Ashwood's usual concise and unflowered style, and though he had endeavoured to introduce a strain of sympathetic condolence for this special occasion, it read rather like concealed

sarcasm than genuine feeling, and ran as follows :—

BLOEMFONTEIN, — *Oct. 18*—

" My dear Mr. Melville,

" It is with feelings of deepest regret that I have to inform you of my cousin Herbert's death. The untoward accident occurred about a week ago in the Kuruman mountains in the Bechuana Country.

" We had been shooting all day, and were returning to camp by a short cut over the mountain, when Herbert, who was behind me, must have lost his footing on a slippery track, and was precipitated several hundred feet on to the rocks below.

" Unfortunately, the guide was not with us, and I was unable to render him any assistance, which, for the matter of that, would have been quite useless, as no human being could have survived such a fall.

" I am now on my way home, and will reserve further details till my return.

" Please remember me most kindly to your

daughter, and tender her my heart-felt sympathy in her great misfortune.

"Believe me,

"Yours faithfully,

"RALPH ASHWOOD."

As soon as she saw her young mistress open the letter, the maid discreetly turned her back, and resumed her ministration to the fire, which like most bed-room fires, had a tendency to emit more smoke than heat.

Mary had occasionally received love-letters herself (before she took to keeping company with James) and had felt the inconvenience of being over-looked whilst she deciphered them, particularly if, as sometimes happened, they were bedaubed with blots, or daubs of sealing wax—meant to represent kisses, on which she was in duty bound to press her own rosy lips.

When however, after making a very liberal allowance of time for all the necessary ceremonies (calculated from her own experiences) she looked round to ask for news of the absent one, great was her dismay at discovering her mis-

tress lying back on the pillows pale and motionless.

"Miss Rose—Miss Rose," she cried, "speak to me—What is the matter?" Then taking her hand which was cold and clammy, and fell nerveless from her grasp, and noticing the death-like hue of her features, the little maid was seized by a horrible fear, and raced frantically downstairs for help.

This was speedily forthcoming in the form of the house-keeper, who arrived breathless and panting at Rose's room, having ascended the stairs at a rate out of all proportion to her years and portly figure, followed by Mary and the rest of her maids.

"She's swooned away, poor dear. Whatever can have happened?" gasped Mrs. Meeking, proceeding to apply the usual restoratives, with a motherly solicitude, which proved that her frame had not enlarged at the expense of her heart.

Meanwhile she cleared the room of all but Rose's own maid, and sent instructions to James to hold himself in readiness to run for the doctor.

For some considerable time her efforts were unavailing, and the old lady was beginning to feel really anxious, when a faint quivering of the eyelids, followed by a deep-drawn sigh, told of returning life.

By-and-by Rose opened her eyes. "Where am I?" she murmured in a faint voice. "O! it's you, Mrs. Meeking. Ah! I've had such a horrible dream!"—Then catching a glimpse of the fatal letter still lying on the counterpane, she uttered a low moan, and crying: "Oh God! it's too true, he is dead—dead!" buried her face in the pillows, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

"My poor darling, don't take on so! Who said so? Perhaps it isn't true," said poor Mrs. Meeking, weeping from very sympathy.

"He's dead—he's dead—I knew it," reiterated Rose, unheeding.

"Shall I send for Dr. Partridge, my poor dear?" enquired Mrs. Meeking, at her wits' end. "Perhaps he can give you a soothing draught."

But Rose only shook her head and continued to moan, although her tears had ceased.

"Well, your aunt then? You ought to see some one."

Not receiving any answer to this proposal, the housekeeper took upon herself to send for Mrs. Irvine, and, notwithstanding her young mistress's murmured desire to be left alone, remained in the room until she arrived.

Naturally the little lady was considerably startled by the unexpected summons, and without waiting to listen to James's confused account of what had happened, dashed into her cloak and pattens, and trotted off to her brother's house, full of sympathy and anxiety for her favourite niece.

Fussy little woman as she was in the ordinary affairs of life, Mrs. Irvine possessed the true instincts of her sex in presence of a great sorrow, and approached the sufferer with calm self-possession, though deep compassion beamed from her eyes and spoke through her voice.

"Rose, my dearest, it is I—your aunt—your second mother, come to share your trouble, and comfort you, with God's help."

At the sound of her voice, and the soft

touch of her hand, the poor girl raised her white face from the pillow.

Deep brown rings encircled her eyes, which shone with an unnatural brilliancy. After one or two ineffectual efforts, she spoke in a hollow and far-off-sounding voice.

"Are we alone? Have they all gone?"

"Quite alone, my darling."

"Then I may tell you. He has killed my Herbert. He is dead—dead, and I shall never see him again."

"Poor child, poor child. But who has killed him?"

"He," and she pointed at Ralph's letter, "his enemy, his cousin, he hated him."

"Good heavens! what do you mean?"

"Read it, it's as plain as though he had written the letter in blood."

"How horrible!" shuddered Mrs. Irvine, taking the letter to the window.

Having read, and re-read it, she returned weeping to her niece's bedside.

"Poor fellow. So young and so strong, to be called away ——"

"Hatred is stronger!" said Rose, still in the same hard tone.

"My darling. You are beside yourself. You don't know what you are saying. One who knows best, has seen fit to remove our loved one by a terrible accident. And all we poor women can do is to pray to Him for comfort and consolation. I know it is hard to submit, but believe me, the best—the only way—is to bow to His decision, and seek relief in prayers and tears."

"It is no accident: and I can neither weep nor pray, unless it be that I may die too."

Mrs. Irvine, although shocked and horrified at her niece's suspicions, was too judicious to attempt to combat them further in her present state.

As the day wore on, Rose became more and more strange and excited. She refused all nourishment, and made half-a-dozen ineffectual efforts to rise and complete her toilette, all the while muttering to herself in a wild and incoherent manner.

At last, Mrs. Irvine, after a brief consultation with her brother, who was himself in a

piteous state of helplessness and nervous exhaustion, despatched a telegram to her husband in London, begging him to return at once, and to bring the family physician, Dr. Eldon, with him.

"I'm sadly afraid her brain is affected by this terrible news," she remarked to Lucy, who had come to enquire the cause of her mother's prolonged absence. "In any case, it won't do to leave the poor child alone all night, so you just run home and put my things together, and James shall go and fetch the bag later on."

"Oh, mamma, let me come and keep you company," pleaded Lucy, "or why not send for Dr. Partridge, till the other comes?"

"Nonsense, my dear. It's not good for young girls to sit up all night. Besides, somebody must be at home to look after poor Harry. And as for calling in Dr. Partridge, I shouldn't think of such a thing, after the manner in which he has behaved. I flatter myself I know a good deal more about nursing than he does—the pompous little fidget."

All night long, poor Rose turned and tossed

in a state of high fever and delirium, which showed no signs of abatement during the following day. And Mrs. Irvine was heartily glad, towards evening, to hear the carriage return, which had been sent to meet her husband and the doctor at the station.

Whilst Dr. Eldon was engaged with his patient, Mr. Irvine took the opportunity of giving his brother-in-law a brief account of his mission.

"I'm sorry I hav'n't better news," he began, "particularly now, with this fresh sad trouble. But it's no use disguising the truth, and we must try to meet our misfortunes like men—and Christians.

"What of Alfred?" asked Mr. Melville, in a broken voice.

"It seems he has taken himself off. Where, I have not been able to discover. Hopwood thinks he has got entangled with some woman—but of course it is only surmise on his part."

"My poor boy!" groaned the unhappy father.

"I don't think he deserves much pity—rather reprobation," replied the other, sternly.

"And the shares?"

"Everything has been left in a state of inextricable confusion—even to Herbert's affairs. Alfred ought never to have been left in a position of responsibility and trust. I called on Parchment and Charges, the solicitors, and they politely told me that they had felt constrained to write to their client informing him of the very irregular manner in which his duties as procurator were being performed."

"What a disgrace! What can the boy have been thinking about?"

"About his own selfish pleasures—as he always has done. However, that matter must rest till Ralph Ashwood's return. I suppose he will inherit the estates—as next of kin. The most pressing question is about your shares. Hopwood advises you to sell—He is strongly of opinion that the whole affair is a swindle from beginning to end, and there have been some awkward disclosures."

"Did he say what they are quoted at now?"

"Somewhere about four or five, but he's not sure of getting that for all yours. Such

a number being offered at once is certain to bring the price down, and at any minute the whole thing may collapse, he says, and the shares become unsaleable.”

“Deuce take it!—was ever man so plagued? What have I done, to be pursued by this perpetual bad luck?”

“Well, I’m not fond of preaching sermons out of the pulpit, but I must say that you have yourself to thank for it. To my mind, you might just as well have sat yourself down at a gaming-table, to stake your thousands at Roulette or Trente-et-quarante, as gamble on the Stock Exchange. What right has a country gentleman with an ample income, to thrust himself in amongst the noisy crowd who struggle and fight for existence, and in their greed or necessity make use of weapons and stratagems unknown to him? They, at any rate, have the excuse that they have a livelihood to earn—but you can advance no such plea. Did you really believe that a safe investment promising 15 or 20 per cent. annual dividend would be offered to the public? Of course you didn’t! You trusted to your luck to sell the

shares at a profit to some bigger fool than yourself—You pitted your ignorance against the knowledge of men on the spot—and then are surprised because you came out a loser."

"That's right, hit me now I am down—That's true Christian charity as practised in this nineteenth century."

"Forgive me, old fellow, if I have trodden a little too hard on your favourite corn—but you know what I am (or rather you don't know, as you never come to church now), when I warm to my subject—and this is one on which I feel very strongly. However, to return to business.—Little as I approve foisting one's own responsibilities on to other people's shoulders, I think in this case you have no other course open but to sell your unlucky shares, if you can find a purchaser. If you decide to do so, you had better wire Mr. Hopwood at once, giving him full discretion to do his best for your interests."

"I cannot make up my mind to so important a step without consideration. Eight or ten thousand pounds is a big sum to throw away. In fact, I doubt if I shall be able to

raise enough ready money to pay my differences."

"I wish I could help you," said the Rector, "but as you know my capital is not large, and I have my children to consider."

"If poor Herbert had been alive, he would have lent me a hand."

"Poor fellow! I have never heard of a sadder and more distressing case, particularly for your dear girl.—There's Dr. Eldon coming down-stairs, shall I call him in here? I'll just hear how Rosie is getting on, and then I must run off home: my parish duties have been sadly neglected of late, I'm afraid."

CHAPTER XI.

WHILST our friends at the Manor House were in a state of feverish unrest and excitement, consequent upon the news of Herbert Ashwood's demise, and poor Rose's severe illness, their neighbours at the Park were also undergoing a period of perturbation and flurry.

Their upheaval, however, arose from less serious causes. Though, thanks to Sir John's fussiness, the discomfort and mental wear and tear of the situation, could hardly have been greater, had the heavens been about to fall, instead of the actual event—the preparations for a tour on the Continent.

Poor Lady Stanfield—in common with all the servants, from the house-steward down to the boy in buttons—was worn to a shadow, and had she possessed a temper, would have had it irretrievably ruined—by the constant

orders and counter orders, directed to the minutest details, which emanated from Sir John's room.

At first she was inclined to regard it as a blessing, that her husband was kept captive by gout, and unable to prowling about and personally supervise all the packings and arrangements. But when she found that, though absent in body, her lord had made up his mind to be present in spirit, and that she had to be the medium of conveying information as to the disposition of nearly every article in the establishment; that he changed his mind about every half hour as to what things he would take abroad, and what lock up at home, and last but not least, that his tempers though varying, were none of the sweetest—the poor lady wished the Continent at the bottom of the sea—being too well brought up to pray for the more obvious alternative—that her husband should be transported to climes where garments and portmanteaux are supposed to be not commonly in request.

Life is too short to worry, and yet how many families are rendered miserable, how

many homes unbearable, by the ceaseless fidgeting and nagging of one of their members?

The man—generally an idle one, and of shallow intellect—who insists on poking his nose into all the details of household affairs; or the woman who invariably imagines herself indispensable to the happiness and comfort of the home which she relentlessly destroys by her perpetual tidying and fault-finding, ought to be put under restraint as enemies to Society.

If we are robbed of our purse, the culprit—when he is caught—can be put in durance vile, but for the loss of our domestic peace—alas! there is no redress.

Alone, amidst the storm, Miss Effie moved calm and serene—or rather, the excitement and bustle was to her an agreeable change, particularly as she took care to keep out of her father's way, and allowed her mother and maid to do her share of the packing. Then there was the clandestine meeting with Harry, and the tender leave-taking, which spread a halo of romance over the otherwise prosaic proceedings.

As arranged, she had driven over to Dingley with Lady Stanfield, ostensibly to bid her aunt good-bye, in reality, as we know, to meet her lover once more.

Of course, Harry was true to his tryst, in fact he arrived at Miss Montgomery's a full hour before the time appointed. He was in that acute stage of the love-fever, when it is quite impossible for the stricken one, to talk or think of anything else but the object of his adoration.

Having almost exhausted the patience of his mother and sister, he bethought him of 'pastures new' in the shape of Effie's aunt. There were so many contingences to discuss, amongst others the Stanfields' departure, which Effie's letter to Lucy darkly foreshadowed, and the old lady was always a sympathetic listener to anything which related to her niece.

At last the Stanfield equipage drove up, and Harry peeping from behind the dining-room curtains—in order that Sir John's servants should not be able to report his presence—was delighted with the view of his darling as she advanced to the door, clad in the most charm-

ing of fur-trimmed travelling costumes—evidently newly home from the great metropolis.

Whilst he was wondering why Lady Stanfield remained in the carriage, Miss Montgomery who had gone into the drawing-room to receive her visitors, re-entered the room and said with a meaning smile :—

"Perhaps you might like to take a stroll down the garden, Mr. Irvine, and it is just possible that somebody may join you there. Quite by accident of course, as my sister must not on any account know that you are here."

Harry did not require any further hint, but promptly transported himself to the far end of the grounds near the rustic bridge, where he had first made his declaration of love.

It was a warm bright November afternoon, one of those rare days of late Autumn when Summer seems to return to take a last fond look on our northern shores.

But Harry had no eye for the charms of nature, the glorious colouring of the rapidly falling foliage, the subdued splendour of the sun, the soft and restful appearance of the surrounding landscape—He had no ear for the

song of the thrush and the blackbird, who were deluded by the return of warmth into the pleasant belief that Winter had fled, and Summer returned.

Eye and ear were on the watch for a form, which, to his mind, transcended all the beauties of nature and art, because it combined them. And as the lithe and graceful figure at length appeared, tripping daintily down the leaf bespattered ride,

“ With roses on her cheeks and dimples in her chin,”

had you or I been present, Reader, we should have doubtless exclaimed with Harry—and the old song :

“ She was fair as a maid could be.”

And so she was, in sober reality, and the little Puss knew it (as what pretty woman does not ?) and delighted in the power of her beauty.

Had she possessed any doubts on that score, they would have been dispelled by the rapturous exclamations of her lover, as he folded her in his arms, and gazed intently in her lustrous eyes.

"Harry, don't stare like that—one would think you were going to eat me!"

"I wish I could—if it would ensure you're never leaving me."

"You silly boy!—You can't eat your cake and have it! Besides the cake objects. Well, and what have you got to say to my coming to say good-bye to you, in spite of them all?"

"That you're an angel!—but you know that already. You haven't told me yet where you're going—nor for how long."

"We start on Monday for Nice. From there we shall go on to Rome and Naples, and return to Paris in the Spring. Isn't it jolly! I'm mad with delight."

"Jolly for you.—But how about poor me, who am left out of it?"

"Well, I daresay you'll feel a little dull at first—but you'll get over that. You men have always plenty to do. Then I shall write to you, and tell you of all our doings. Oh! it will be delightful. And the best of it is that I owe it to you."

"How's that?"

"Why, Papa is taking me abroad to get me

away from your pernicious influence—You bad boy!”

“I only hope he won’t be successful!” muttered Harry gloomily. The happy manner in which she regarded this six months’ parting, did not attune with his own feelings on the subject.

“Hav’n’t I promised to love you always—if you behave yourself properly. And do you think I shall depart from my word?” she asked, indignantly.

Of course he assured her that he regarded her promise as sacred, and vowed to try and make himself worthy of her; but a feeling of constraint had already arisen between them. This journey occupied her thoughts to the exclusion of that other topic which he thought alone worthy of consideration—their love.

He had come prepared to urge upon her the necessity for flight and a private marriage, if her father still remained obdurate. Anything rather than separation. And now, he found her not only not unwilling, but even joyous at the thought of going away.

Was this the Effie who had written him that

tender letter but a few days ago—who had vowed never to be parted from him?

Souvent femme varie. Then her life was dull and purposeless. Now a new excitement had appeared—and lo! Cupid's wings were clipped.

At last Harry made a desperate effort, and in a few hurried passionate words, begged her not to submit to be torn away from him—not to let absence and other people come between him and his love—entreated her to remember that his life was bound up in hers, and that in the sight of Heaven, they were as much man and wife, as though the marriage vow had been pronounced.

She frowned, shook her head impatiently, arched her eyebrows, and finally said in the tone of a spoilt child asked to yield up its last new toy :—

"And give up this lovely trip for which I have longed so often? You *couldn't* be so selfish as to ask me to do *that*, Harry.—Besides think how scandalised everybody would be. And all my new dresses wasted?—By the way, how do you like this one, Sir? This is for travelling

in till we come to the warm sunny South.—It only came home last night."

It only 'came home' to poor Harry at that moment, that he had given his best and strongest affection to a girl who classed it as second in importance to a new Paris costume, and accordingly he felt very bitter against her—himself—and the whole world.

He could not trust himself to speak, but turned aside with a choking sensation in his throat.

Suddenly two little fur-clad arms were flung round his neck, and the lovely violet-blue eyes were looking beseechingly up into his.

"What's the matter, Harry? You're not angry surely with your poor little Effie, just when she is going away—and oh! so sorry to leave *you*—though glad to get away from dull old Stoneheaton for a little while."

Who could look into that winning child-like face, and continue to nurse his wrath?—Not Harry, certainly. He stooped down and kissed her, with a sad grave smile, which puzzled her exceedingly. But from that moment, his eyes were opened to the fact that his goddess had

no heart to give—or at any rate, that he had not succeeded in waking it.

He had committed a grand mistake. He had built his house upon the sand. Well, it was lucky he had found it out before it was too late, and it was not worth while to turn round and chide the sand for being unstable.

With all his faults, Harry was a gentleman at heart, and fancied himself a bit of a philosopher. Heaven knows he would need all his philosophy later on, when the first numbing effects of the blow had worn off, and nothing but the dull aching void remained!

Again she spoke: "Harry, dearest, you will never forget your poor little sweetheart, will you? I shall always remember the happy days we have passed together!"

And he replied in a semi-paternal tone: "No, dear, I shall never forget you.—Your aunt is calling you—Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my darling, dearest Harry," she cried, flinging herself into his arms half-weeping. "I shall soon be back, and all will come right. I shall tell papa every day that I am miserable without you, and shall never love anybody else."

Harry felt that he knew better, but he could not tell her so. Doubtless she then meant what she said, but he had a strong presentiment that 'this was their last good-bye'.

He stood watching the retreating form of her who, but a short half-hour ago, he regarded as his own for ever. And now? Every step she took away from him—away towards new excitements and attractions, meant that they were drifting apart—mentally as well as physically.

She stopped once, and turned back to wave him a last adieu ere she emerged on to the lawn, and he, imagining for one fond moment that she had relented and was coming back,—bounded forward to meet her half way. But she only signed to him not to approach, and with a gay smile skipped onwards towards the house.

At best of times, parting from those we love has a depressing effect upon the spirits, but when the loved one goes gladly, showing no sympathy with our grief, or thought of our suffering, the pang is bitter indeed.

How could he face Miss Montgomery, and

continue to make plans for a delusive future? How answer the loving questions of mother and sister, without betraying what it was now a matter of pride to conceal,—the wound he had received?

He was engaged—yet not engaged. At least no words of hers had released him from his promise. And yet he felt that his 'dream was o'er,' and Effie would never be his.

In the first bitterness of his passion, his one desire was to avoid meeting friends or acquaintances who would question and condole with him on his disappointment.

With this idea, he forced his way through the shrubbery towards a garden-gate which opened on to the road away from the house.

As he traversed the miniature wood with rapid strides, thrusting aside bushes and saplings that came in his path, he suddenly lighted upon the form of Miss Toodles, crouched behind a spreading oak, not twenty yards from where he had parted with Effie.

Before he had time to turn his steps, that lady started up in evident confusion, and advancing towards him, said, with her sweetest

smile: “What a lovely afternoon, Mr. Irvine, only a little damp. I was looking for fir-cones for the school-children. The little dears are so easily pleased, and believe they will grow into trees. I remember my poor mother used to tell me ——”

“Your mother didn’t tell you that fir-cones grew on oaks, did she?” interrupted Harry, savagely, rightly suspecting that she had been eavesdropping.

“Well, no, not exactly, but you see——” began Miss Toodles, in no wise abashed. But Harry was in no mood to bandy words with her, and brushed on towards the gate, leaving the companion to conclude her explanations for the benefit of the birds and trees, if they cared to listen.

Once in the road, he turned his steps towards Belmore, where he partook of a solitary meal at the ‘Fishers’ Arms,’ and timed his return home for an hour when he was sure to find the little household retired for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

“**A**ND how is our poor dear invalid this morning?” enquired Mrs. Tod Mountjoy, ushering herself into the morning-room where Mr. Melville was sitting, disconsolately scanning his ‘daily’. “Or rather I should say our poor *invalids*, for you are looking very poorly yourself. How do *you* feel, *dear* Mr. Melville?”

“I’ve had a very bad night—as usual, and my head aches as it always does,” he replied querulously.

“Poor soul! And darling Rose?”

“The doctor reports rather more favourably of her, but she is still unable to leave her room, and is not allowed to see anybody.”

“How provoking, when I came on purpose to sit with her, and try to cheer the poor girl up a bit,” replied the widow, who did not look much suited for such a task. “Well, you must let me stay and have a chat with *you*. You

must feel very desolate all alone and with such a houseful of trouble."

"You are very kind," murmured Mr. Melville, gratefully. He had grown quite accustomed to these morning visitations, and found that the widow's tender solicitude and sympathy supplied a craving of his weak nature.

This sudden intimacy had sprung up since Rose's illness. Till within the last month or six weeks, Mr. Melville had known Mrs. Mountjoy only as a near neighbour and a casual visitor.

But during their period of trial, that lady had called most persistently for news of the 'poor sufferer,' and evinced so much interest in his daughter's welfare, that Mr. Melville had felt bound to see her, and express his thanks in person.

From that day, the widow felt that she had obtained a footing in the house, and determined to maintain it.

She was always 'dropping-in' with some little delicacies which she had 'prepared with her own hands,' or a prescription given her by an eminent London physician; and as the

invalid was not to be disturbed, she insisted upon seeing the master of the house, to explain their peculiar virtues.

It was a noticeable fact that during these *tête-à-tête* interviews, the 'dear departed,' whose name for the last ten years was ever on the lips of his disconsolate relict, was no longer unearthed (his memory of course), and so to speak—stood up like a lay figure on which to hang a panegyric ; and further, that the depth of her woe, as expressed by her crape trimmings and generally funereal appearance, had considerably narrowed.

Hope peeped forth in the violet ribbons of her cap, and a dash of coquetry in the white lace collar and cuffs, which suddenly appeared on the sombre scene of her dress.

Any woman would have noted these signs as straws that show which way the wind is blowing.

But during this chrysalid period, Mrs. Tod Mountjoy had no intercourse with the ladies of the house, Rose being still confined to her room, and Mrs. Irvine in constant attendance on her niece.

On this particular morning, the widow had surpassed herself in her aspirations after a more cheerful demeanour and appearance.

She had done something towards restraining the two lank curls that generally flopped about her head like cypress boughs. A flower of some dark shade of red actually gleamed from beneath her bonnet, which was shorn of its usual hearse-like plumes, and to complete the metamorphosis, she carried a basket of red and white camellias. Altogether, habited as she was in a neat black silk dress and fashionable Astrakhan jacket, she looked so abnormally cheerful and presentable, that James, who answered the door on her arrival, declared in confidence to Mary, that he was 'struck all of a heap,' and notwithstanding that young damsel's pert assertion, that she was 'like a funeral out for a holiday,' persisted in declaring that 'the widder wasn't half a bad looking old party, when she was brushed up a bit'.

Such indeed was Mr. Melville's thought,—although not in exactly the same phraseology,—as the lady entered the room.

He too had noticed the recent change from

‘grave to gay,’ and rightly interpreting it as a delicate attention towards himself, felt correspondingly flattered.

Whilst Rose was always about the house, bright and well, to look after his little comforts and cheer him in his hours of depression, the thought of marrying again had not occurred to him ; or if it had, he was too lazy and listless to pursue it further. But now, with his daughter a prisoner in her sick-room, and likely long to remain so ; with his son undiscovered, and, if rumour spoke true—disgraced ; and with his monetary affairs in a state of inextricable confusion, he began to feel the need of a prop and companion.

True, Mrs. Tod Mountjoy was rather beneath him in the social scale, and although their acquaintance had been of the slightest, Rose had always expressed a feeling of antipathy to her, shared by Mrs. Irvine and all her family, since her betrayal of Harry and Effie. But on the other hand, the widow was supposed to be comfortably off, she had no encumbrances beyond the ‘widow’s mite,’—her good little ‘wicked’ son—and she seemed most tender and sympathetic.

In short, she was there,—on the spot,—and appeared inclined, with a very little encouragement, to do the wooing herself, which to a man of Mr. Melville's temperament, was a great commendation.

This being the state of his mind, he viewed the enemy's evident intention of advancing to the assault, on this bright morning in January, with equanimity, and a sort of lazy amusement.

First she unfurled her colours—in other words, brought forth her basket of flowers, and then like a skilled general, fired a gun at long range—so as to feel the disposition of the opposing force.

"I fear it's like 'bringing coals to Newcastle,' but I thought you might like a few of my first blooms—of which I am very proud—for I am my own head gardener. Not like you, with your hot-houses and forcing-pits, and half-a-dozen professed horticulturists."

"Indeed no! We have nothing so fine as these, or if they are in the houses, the gardener doesn't bring them in," he replied, with languid interest. "But you are under a mistaken im-

pression, my—er—my affairs have necessitated considerable retrenchment of late, and the garden suffers in consequence. Half of the men have gone, and unless matters improve, the remainder will have to follow."

This he said, feeling that as a man of honour, he could not accept the proposal which he foresaw she was about to make, without giving her some insight into his financial embarrassment.

"How sorry I am! It is true then? I had heard something about it.—But after all riches are not essential to happiness—at least not to *mine*," and her eyes were lifted beseechingly to his face.

Mrs. Tod Mountjoy had rather fine eyes,—and she knew it. She also knew a great deal more about Mr. Melville's affairs, than he imagined,—though not quite all. Like a prudent woman, she had weighed the pros and cons, but having once made up her mind that the former outweighed the latter, she was not to be daunted by the fear of a little temporary retrenchment.

After all, the Manor House although shorn of its former splendour, would be a finer place

than her cottage under any circumstances, and its mistress, a much greater personage in the village, than Mrs. Tod Mountjoy.

Mr. Melville was touched by her seeming disinterestedness.

"I daresay you're right," he replied with a sigh, "though most people think differently. What perfect blooms! May I take one?"

"They are all for you—if you will accept them. I only wish I could be of some *real* service to you, dear Mr. Melville," and the widow sighed too—but sentimentally.

This was a good opening, but Mr. Melville was slow to take advantage of it. A man of fifty does not rush to propose with the impetuosity of youth. Then again, he was sure of his widow, and if he left her alone, she would save him the trouble.

"You are very kind," he said. "In fact more than kind, and I hardly know how to thank you."

"No thanks are needed between friends.—And we are friends—are we not? Although but new ones. Adversity draws hearts together, and I have led a lonely life too long to

be able to spare the affect—the liking of a single friend—particularly of such a one as *you*."

The languishing glance which accompanied these words, sealed Mr. Melville's fate.

Decidedly she was a good-looking woman! He had never seen her look so nice before. Even his sluggish pulses quickened a little, and like an old hunter at the sound of the horn and the music of the hounds, he pulled himself together, and felt for the moment quite eager for the chase.

"I wish I could think you meant what you said—that you could take sufficient interest in a broken-down invalid to —"

"Oh, Charles!" and the widow was just about to sink rapturously into his arms, when a tap at the door caused her to execute a flank movement on to a distant chair.

"May I come in, Charley?" enquired Mrs. Irvine, taking the permission as granted. "I wanted to tell you what Dr. Eldon says —" Then catching sight of Mrs. Mountjoy: "I beg your pardon, I was not aware you had visitors."

"It's only our friend, Mrs. Tod Mountjoy—

who has kindly called to enquire after Rose," said her brother, with an air of confusion, which did not escape Mrs. Irvine's eagle eye.

"Oh, indeed! Very kind of Mrs. Mountjoy. Very kind, I'm sure." This with the slightest possible intonation of sarcasm, and still without looking towards the lady, who had risen and was awaiting some sign of recognition.

"You know her, I believe, Lucy—or shall I introduce you?" murmured Mr. Melville, feebly—feeling more and more like a school-boy caught in the act of 'spooning' his master's daughter.

"Quite unnecessary, dear Mr. Melville," broke in the widow, in her most honeyed tones. "I have known your sister *by sight* for these last ten years, and have often longed to become more nearly acquainted."

"And I have known Mrs. Tod Mountjoy by reputation so long, and more particularly by her last kindly interference in the affairs of my family, that any further introduction would be superfluous," said Mrs. Irvine, turning her back on the widow's outstretched

hand, and flushing with suppressed excitement. "When you are quite at liberty, Charles, I shall be glad to have a little *private* conversation with you, on a matter of urgent importance, which concerns dear Rose."

"If Mrs. Mountjoy will kindly excuse me a moment," said Mr. Melville, quailing beneath his sister's fiery glance.

"O don't mention it, I beg, dear Mr. Melville. Of course the dear invalid must be our first consideration. So, if you'll allow me, I'll say good-bye now, and look in again to-morrow for further news of the poor girl," and the widow rose, and grasped his hand with her most bewitching smile. "Good-bye, please don't trouble to come to the door—I can let myself out. Good morning, dear Mrs. Irvine, I hope your son is getting over his sad disappointment. It would have been such a *good* match for him,—but Sir John is *so* proud and stand-offish. I hate people like that—don't you?"

"I really wonder, Charles, at your encouraging that detestable woman," said his sister, when the widow had executed her masterly

retreat. "She's been the cause of mischief enough to our family already."

"I don't see why you should blame her for Sir John's pig-headedness. Besides, if a lady chooses to call, I can't shut the door in her face."

"There are plenty of excuses you might make. It's like her impertinence,—intruding herself in a time of family affliction. A woman of no position, and a rank dissenter!"

"Well, my dear Lucy, I decline to be answerable for other people's religious opinions. If Mrs. Mountjoy's are rotten, you should get Henry to call upon her and effect a conversion."

"I fancy I see my husband derogating himself by calling upon such a woman! She's welcome to dissent as much as she likes,—we don't want her."

"If you won't take steps to bring her into the right path, you have no right to blame her for straying," said Mr. Melville, pluming himself on the wily manner in which he had distracted his sister's attention from his personal relations with the obnoxious widow.

"All I can say is, that she is a nasty sly mis-

chief-maker, and no lady—and I hate her," replied the little woman, worsted in argument, but not at all disposed to own herself beaten.

Mr. Melville smiled uneasily. He had almost made up his mind to let the widow marry him, but if he did, it was evident that there would be a split in the family. The question was, had he not gone too far to draw back?

True to his practice of shelving all unpleasant decisions, he determined to await the course of events, and, to change the subject, asked Mrs. Irvine what Dr. Eldon had to report about Rose's progress.

"Of course,—that's what I came to talk to you about when that horrid woman put it out of my head," exclaimed his sister. "He says the fever has almost entirely left her, but the poor child is terribly weak, and will want careful nursing for some time to come. When she is strong enough to move, he recommends a short stay at Torquay or Bournemouth.

"I hate leaving home, and I can't bear sea-side places. You know they never agree with me," he said, peevishly.

"Yes, I know that, and I was going to propose that she should come with me. I want a change myself, and I am sure it would do Harry good. Poor boy, since the Stanfields have left, he does nothing but mope about miserably all day long,—at least, so Lucy says, for I hav'n't seen much of him lately."

"No indeed, you have devoted yourself to Rose," exclaimed her brother, warmly.

"One can't be in two places at once, unfortunately, otherwise I expect they are sadly missing me at home, and in the village. They are all such 'moony' beings, and want waking up," said the little lady, who really believed that she was the key which kept the mechanism of her little world going.

"Well, if you have really made up your mind to burden yourself with poor Rosie —" began Mr. Melville.

"Of course I have, and I shall write off at once for rooms at Torquay. Dr. Eldon thinks she will be fit to move in about a fortnight, and I am anxious to get the poor child away before Ralph Ashwood arrives. She has such an intense dread of meeting him."

"By the way, Lucy, did I tell you that I had a letter from him this morning? He has reached England, and is staying at Ashwood Court."

"Ah! the poor mother! What a sad re-awakening of sorrow for her! How she must contrast Ralph's last visit in the company of her son, with his present arrival as bearer of the melancholy details of his death. It would kill me, I know!"

"He says the old lady bears it wonderfully well. She is very cold and calm, and never demonstrative. I judge from his letter, that as soon as Mrs. Ashwood can spare him, he will come on here."

"That's all the more reason for my getting Rose away at once. The sight of him now, would drive her mad, or kill her."

"What can be the cause of this senseless aversion? They used to be such good friends," asked Mr. Melville, to whom the wild suspicions to which Rose gave utterance in her first moments of delirium and agony, had not been communicated. Then, without waiting for an answer: "I only hope he will not have for-

gotten his friendship for us. We shall need it badly, when that unlucky boy's irregularities have to be disclosed."

"Yes, it's a bad job—But after all it was he who left Alfred in a position of responsibility, for which, as he must have known, he was by no means suited. Had he suspected that his own interests were at stake instead of his cousin's, he would probably have exercised a little more common sense."

"You should hardly say that. I expect he did it out of compliment to us. I'm sure Herbert always had the highest opinion of his cousin's probity."

"I daresay he had—but Ralph knew Alfred's wild and reckless disposition, and it's childish to expect 'grapes from thorns'."

"Unhappy boy! Goodness knows from whom he inherited his evil propensities," said Mr. Melville, unwilling, like most weak fathers, to admit his own responsibility. "I'm sure I gave him the best possible education, and it's not my fault if he has gone wrong. The worst of it is that I had counted on poor Herbert to help me out of my present difficulties—Instead

of which, I may be called upon to make good Alfred's deficiencies."

"Ralph Ashwood is a gentleman, and he will surely not press you too hardly under the circumstances. I suppose he will be very wealthy now?"

"Yes, he comes in for all his cousin's property. What a spice of luck for him—Some people are always lucky! I suppose if Rose had been engaged to him, the accident would never have happened."

"What *do* you mean—you don't suppose—?"—ejaculated Mrs. Irvine, calling to mind her niece's terrible suspicions.

"What should I mean, but that with the ill-luck which pursues me, if my child had married a beggar,—a beggar he would have remained all his life?" exclaimed her brother bitterly.

"I thought at one time that Ralph himself was tender in that quarter," observed Mrs. Irvine.

"I believe he was, but she didn't seem to care for him, at least not after she knew his cousin. And now he's become a man

of property, I suppose he'll fly for higher game."

Mrs. Irvine scarcely listened, she was following out this new train of thought. What more natural and fitting than that Ralph should replace his cousin in this, as in his other capacities? The little woman was neither hard-hearted nor mercenary, but that ten thousand a-year should be lost to the family, for the sake of a girl's foolish fancies, seemed a downright pity.

"Except for dear Rosie's absurd prejudices, I don't see why—in time—this shouldn't come off," she mused aloud. "She can't remain single all her life. It's a terrible blow, no doubt, but people get over these things—and I'm sure poor Herbert would have wished it."

"Do you really think it's possible?" cried Mr. Melville, grasping at the idea. "What a relief it would be to me—to us all. My dear Lucy, you're an angel of wisdom—I wish you'd speak to the poor child, and persuade her to be reasonable."

"Gently, Charles—gently. You're always in such furious haste, and that's why you

never carry anything through. If I were to mention the subject to her now, or even hint at it in her present frame of mind, she would have a relapse for sure, and equally certainly never see or speak to Ralph Ashwood again. Are you so old, that you have forgotten what it was to be in love?"—Here Mr. Melville fidgeted uneasily, and almost blushed at the recollection of the widow—"No, the subject must not be mentioned for months,—perhaps not at all. Let us see what time, and Ralph's persuasions—if he is still of the same mind,—will effect. When they fail, will be time enough for us to try our hand," and the little woman assumed such a Minerva-like air of wisdom that her brother was lost in admiration, and promised to obey her counsel implicitly.

CHAPTER XIII.

NICE was in the full whirl and glitter of the season. And although in the gloomy north, not so many hundred leagues away, frost, snow, and fog reigned supreme, here all was sunshine and flowers.

Palms waved their feathery heads in the public gardens, where the bands played daily. Roses and pelargoniums clustered all over the mossy slopes of the promenade ; flower-girls had their stalls teeming with violets and prim-roses at the corner of every street.

The blue Mediterranean stretched out its wide expanse, far as the eye could reach, its tiny sunlit waves breaking on the sparkling shore with a gentle lapping sound, which in itself was music.

And over all, the cloudless azure of the 'sunny South'.

Miss Effie Stanfield was gazing entranced on the scene below and before her, from the window of their private sitting-room in one of the large hotels on the 'Promenade des Anglais'.

Gay equipages were dashing up and down the drive. Loungers, in every variety of costume, were lolling about under sun-shades, listening to the band.

"Mamma, it seems almost impossible to believe that this is winter—the same dull, dreary winter, that we have at home," she cried in an outburst of enthusiasm. "How can people be so stupid as to remain shivering in England, when they can have perpetual spring here? I wish Papa would buy a villa, and come here every year."

"You'd soon tire of it, my dear. It's only the novelty makes it appear so charming," replied Lady Stanfield, repressing a yawn. "Besides think of the expense and the trouble of moving."

"O, I'm sure I shouldn't. I call it a lovely place, so full of life and gaiety. Think what a treat it is to me, after being moped up all these years at stupid old Stoneheaton. And

you like it too—you old dear. I'm sure you do—though you're too lazy to say so. After all, what is the good of hoarding up money?—It's much better to spend it, and get your enjoyment out of it," said Miss Effie, with the air of a philosopher.

"There is only one thing for it. You will have to marry some foreign grandee with heaps of money, and then there's a chance of your wishes being gratified," smiled her mother.

"Why a foreigner?"

"Because an Englishman does not like to give up his hunting and shooting, whilst he is young;—and then when he gets old, he considers moving about too much trouble, and so he stops at home to vegetate and grumble all the winter."

"Well, there goes somebody, who will do for me," cried Effie, gaily. "Here, mammy, come and have a peep at my 'future'. Do you see him? That dark *distingué*-looking man driving the team of bays. I didn't know foreigners could drive four-in-hand. And look at the two grooms all smothered in lace and cockades, stuck up on that little bench behind!

What a funny vehicle—not a bit like our drags."

"I think it's what they call a *char-à-bancs*," said Lady Stanfield, coming to the window. "I can't see his face, but he seems to handle his horses well."

"O, he's a love of a man! I'm sure he must be some great personage. How would you like your daughter to become Mme. la Princesse?"

"What would poor Harry say?"

"O Harry! I had forgotten all about him. That reminds me, I meant to write and give him a good scolding. He has never answered my last."

"My dear Effie!—You know your father expressly forbade you to have any further communication of any kind with him, poor boy!"

"And you know, my dear mammy, that I never do what I am told—unless it suits me, and that I object to being ordered to write to this person, and not to write to that," said Miss Effie, fetching her writing-case and seating herself at the window.—"It's not my fault, if Papa chooses to be obstinate, I'm not going to give Harry up for that. All the same it's very

wrong of him not to have answered my letter, and I mean to tell him so."

Lady Stanfield had a shrewd suspicion that her husband had adopted a very simple method of bringing the objectionable correspondence to a close, by looking through the letter-bag every morning, and abstracting any that showed signs of emanating from the Rectory, but she stood too much in awe of both husband and daughter, to venture to make any such suggestion.

Effie had spoken the truth. The novelty and excitement of travel had put her absent lover almost out of her head. In her heart, he can hardly be said ever to have been.

The self-reproach called forth by the remembrance of this fact, did not tend to soften her feelings towards Harry. *Les absents ont toujours tort.* She was a little vexed with herself, and so she vented her annoyance upon him,—a habit not peculiar to this young lady.

The letter was just finished and addressed, when Sir John entered the room.

Lady Stanfield started and looked significantly at her daughter, warning her to conceal

the contraband epistle. But Effie had at any rate the courage of her opinions, and left it boldly on the secretaire.

"This is really a very charming place—such good society," remarked Sir John, in high good humour. He had that morning received notification of his election on a very select *Cercle*, much in vogue amongst the distinguished visitors, and had just looked in to pay his subscription and hear the news. "I find my friend, Lord Bolting, is a member, and the Hon. Charles Carysford, and a number of men I know by name and reputation. It is really quite a pleasant *réunion*."

"It is very nice to meet your friends abroad," hazarded Lady Stanfield. "They always seem so much more friendly, and less formal than at home."

"I cannot altogether agree with you there, Lady Stanfield," said Sir John, who rarely agreed with her in anything. "Familiarity is a form of affectation I cannot abide, and a man of position, of public note, is bound to be well received anywhere. Only I allow it is gratifying to meet with respect and recognition

from foreigners of the highest rank, as well as from one's own countrymen."

"I don't see the use of Clubs," cried Miss Effie. "They're nasty selfish institutions, invented to annoy the opposite sex. Why can't they admit ladies? There'd be some sense in them then."

"Prince Pulowski, the president, received me most kindly," continued Sir John, not heeding his daughter's interruption, "and presented me to several prominent members—the Duc di Campobuono, Marquis de l'Estrange, Baron Lohrdorf, and others—all men of note. It is really quite a pleasant change to find oneself among European celebrities. One gets a little too parochially-minded, always remaining at home and moving with the same set."

The real secret of the worthy baronet's satisfaction, lay in the fact that, whereas Sir John Stanfield at home was regarded as an inflated wind-bag, abroad—people being unaware of his naturally frog-like proportions—he was able to pass himself off as a full-grown ox,—parabolically speaking.

It was a great charm for him to be able to pose as a representative British public man, and he rose to the character, and more than ever imagined himself a minister of foreign affairs, 'in posse'.

"There comes 'mon Prince' again," cried Effie from the window. "Oh he is a good-looking man! Who can he be?"

"That's my friend the Duc di Campobuono," said Sir John, looking over her shoulder, "an Italian nobleman of immense fortune. We left the Club together, and he offered to drive me back to the Hotel."

"Why didn't you accept, Papa? I should, if I had the chance. See there he's bowing to you!" and Miss Effie withdrew discreetly from the window,—not however until she had given the duke an opportunity of admiring the pretty picture presented by her fresh young face and figure, framed by the window curtains, and thrown up by the dark background of the room.

As Sir John returned the salute, his eye fell on the missive lying on Effie's *secrètaire*. He frowned ominously, coughed, and was about to

give utterance to a sense of his displeasure, when noticing how intently his daughter was watching the retreating duke, a sudden inspiration seemed to cross his mind, and for a wonder he restrained himself.

“Excellent idea—splendid alliance,—‘my daughter the duchess,’”—he muttered beneath his breath—Then raising his voice:—“Effie, my child,—if you like I will take you for a stroll on the promenade. It is a lovely morning, and every body is out.”

“Oh, thank you, dear, I won’t be two moments getting ready,” said Effie, retiring to her room, and wondering at this sudden access of affability.

When she had gone Sir John turned to his wife.

“I can hardly say that I am surprised at your countenancing such contempt of my instructions as exhibited in this,” and he held up the unlucky letter addressed to Harry Irvine, “but I am none the less disgusted.”

“Well but, Sir John, how can I help it? You know—”

“No excuses and prevarications, I beg. But

oblige me by taking care that this letter does *not* reach its destination."

"But surely, it is cruel—"

"Lady Stanfield, I will not re-open the discussion,—my decision is fixed, immutable."

"At any rate, do not force me to act in this underhand manner towards my own daughter—"

"If you wish you can give it to your maid to send to the post, but bid her come to me first for instructions," said Sir John, with a machiavelian smile.

Lady Stanfield sighed, and was about to reply when Effie re-entered the room, exclaiming: "*Me voici, Papa—toute prête.*"

"*A vos ordres, Mademoiselle,*" replied Sir John, gaily offering her his arm and casting a warning glance at his wife and the obnoxious letter as he left the room.

After sauntering up and down the Promenade, Sir John and his daughter seated themselves within hearing of the band, and facing the sea.

Presently the equipage of the Italian nobleman drew up next the rails, and the

Duke descending from his lofty perch, strolled up to pay his devoirs to ‘Sir Stanfield’ and his lovely daughter.

After presentation in due form, the Duke engaged Miss Effie in conversation.

“I do not spek English very good,—and you not Italian?” he began, with a glance of undisguised admiration, in no wise resented by the little flirt.

“Alas ! no, my knowledge of your beautiful language is confined to songs,” she replied ; “but I can understand French, if you do not speak too fast.”

“Let us then speak French—It is my second mother-tongue,” he said—“I pass six months of every year in that Queen of Cities—Paris.”

“How charming !” replied Effie, in French, “I have only once been there, for a few days, but I think it a delightful place.”

“Mademoiselle is right—Naples is beautiful, Rome is interesting, London is marvellous, but Paris alone is always gay.”

“It may be insular prejudice,” interposed Sir John, “but I maintain that London in the season—”

"Ah yes, in the season!—But that is like you English. Everything is seasonable in your country except the weather. You flock together in London in the Spring, and then I admit it is gay—in its sad way, if gaiety consists in crowding to the Row, or the cricket matches or the ball-rooms. Everywhere the same crowd and the same people. But August comes—paff!—London is deserted, and the same crowds meet in Scotland or Switzerland, and talk the same talk, and try to live the nearest possible approach to the same lives as in the previous five months. There is no 'verve' no 'entrain' in the English character,—at least not as a rule, much as I admire your nation." This with another speaking glance at Miss Effie.

"We are like our Capital,—we want knowing," said Sir John, didactically.

"No doubt you well repay the trouble. *La vie intime* in England, I am told, is very charming, but it has never been my lot to enter the charmed circle.—May I hope to commence my studies here?"

"Ah, monsieur le duc, we shall be only too

pleased,” replied the baronet, flattered, “but we are a very quiet family.”

“Speak for yourself, Papa!—I adore gaiety—and change—I have never been so happy in my life as here, away from home,” chimed in Miss Effie.

“I hope you will allow me to add to your pleasure and my own, by acting as cicerone during your visit,” said the Duke preparing to take leave.

“You are very kind,” replied Sir John, “and as an installation into your offices, will you favour us with your company at dinner to-night, and allow me to introduce you to Lady Stanfield? Hotel-fare is all we can offer you.”

“I shall be delighted,” said the duke, bowing his adieux.

“A most intellectual and intelligent man. One who knows how to appreciate the worth of others,” remarked the baronet. “You noticed, Effie, how respectfully he listened to my opinions, and seemed to form his own upon them? What a fortune and position too! Ah! he would make a husband of whom any woman might be proud.”

Effie said nothing, but as she walked by her father's side, her little head was busily revolving schemes for the future. She pictured to herself the life of a 'grande dame,' endless gaiety and excitement, unlimited dresses and jewels, worship and respect from a host of admirers; and then as a contrast—that of a country doctor's wife—love in a cottage—contentment perhaps, but no superfluities—no luxuries, nothing to look forward to but the dull monotony of every-day existence. And from that moment—although she did not admit it to herself—Harry's fate was sealed.

That evening the Duke di Campobuono dined with them, as arranged.

The dinner was the best that money could procure, for Sir John whilst grudging every penny spent by his wife and family, understood good living, and could be lavish in pursuit of his own gratification.

Their guest was amiability itself, having evidently come with the intention of pleasing, and being pleased.

Sir John pranced about on his high horse, retailed anecdotes of his ancestors' prowess,

and his own sterling merits and high consideration, and with such a listener, felt himself in the Seventh Heaven.

Lady Stanfield was as usual, languidly agreeable, and as for Effie, she was simply startling. Habited in one of her Paris dresses, which displayed her girlish but graceful figure to the greatest advantage, her cheeks rose-tinted, and her eyes sparkling with suppressed excitement, she presented a picture to captivate the senses of any man with eyes and heart susceptible to the charms of nature's master-piece—woman.

And the Duke, all man of the world and *roué* as he was, gave himself up to the fascinations of this blue-eyed Siren.

Women he had known and loved (after a fashion) by the score. But never before had he met with such grace and beauty, such brilliancy and ‘verve,’ combined with the apparent absence of self-consciousness or *mauvaise honte*, which characterised Effie Stanfield.

There is always a certain charm in the intercourse with women of another nation. Their little differences of manner and ways of

thought, the thousand small traits of character which peep out one by one like violets under a wayside hedge, the accent itself, and the (to us)—quaint modes of expression, lend a piquancy, wanting in those with whose characteristics we are familiar.

Never had Effie felt in such spirits. Grati-
fied vanity and a sense of extended power,
exerted an intoxicating influence over her,
whilst robbing her of none of the charms of
girlish innocence and grace. A kind of exalta-
tion, such as is experienced by a youthful
gambler who sits down for the first time con-
fident in his luck, to try a bout with fortune
for really high stakes, thrilled her frame and
led to brilliant sallies and witty remarks, which
charmed the Duke and astonished her parents.

When their guest rose to depart, he had ex-
tracted a promise from the baronet that he
should have the honour of driving him and his
ladies over to Monaco on the following day.

Effie was radiant at the idea. "I'm sure I
shall love gambling!" she cried, "though it is
so naughty. And I'm sure to win—beginners
always do—they say."

"But my dear Effie," began her mother, horrified, "your father will never allow you to play."

"Ah! Miladi, with you and Sir Stanfield and myself, to look after your charming daughter—you surely will not deny her the amusement for once," pleaded the Duke. "I will be her sponsor, if you will allow me."

"Well, we will see about it, when we arrive there," said Sir John, who hardly liked to run counter to his guest's wishes. "Though I must say I don't approve of young ladies showing themselves at gaming-tables."

"Every rule has its exception, Papa—so let me be the exception for this once. It will be such fun!" chimed in Miss Effie.

"No man can resist such sweet pleading," said the Duke gallantly, "and if your father permits, we will form an alliance, you and I, and you shall play for me. If a glance of those *beaux yeux* cannot attract fortune, nothing can!"

With these words, he took his departure, leaving his entertainers in a pleased flutter of excitement.

Effie forgot to ask whether her letter to Harry had been posted. Indeed, the recollection of her absent lover was as far distant from her as his bodily presence, and her mother naturally forbore to remind her of it.

As she kissed her daughter and wished her good-night, Lady Stanfield could not refrain from whispering: “So my little Effie has made up her mind to be a Duchess—has she?”

To which remark Miss Effie vouchsafed no reply, beyond shrugging her pretty shoulders, and making the sauciest little *moue*, as she skipped out of the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE bright winter days glided swiftly by on the sunny shores of the Mediterranean. But for their comparative shortness, for the occasional *souppçon* of white frost in the early morning, and a certain icy keenness in the breezes that swept down from the snow-clad Alps, when the sun was preparing to sink to rest in the westward heavens, no child of the North could have believed that this was the time of year usually associated with chilblains and colds in the head, with ulsters and umbrellas.

To Effie Stanfield it seemed a perfect Elysium.

Since they had become acquainted with the Duc di Campobuono, they had a daily round of pleasurable excitements. Riding, driving, and boating excursions, were made to all the beautiful and interesting localities in the neigh-

bourhood, and the evenings were filled up with brilliant entertainments at the villas of the many acquaintances they had made through their new friend's introductions, or by visits to the theatre and concerts, where artists of no mean order displayed their talents, in short and ever-varying succession.

So charmed were the Stanfields with their first flying visit to Monte Carlo, that, notwithstanding the shock to Sir John's insular prejudices, at the excessively 'mixed' society they met in the saloons, he was persuaded by the Duke, who was engaged to shoot in some of the pigeon matches, and, moreover, had one or two horses entered for the races, to shift his quarters there for a week.

"After all," he said, in answer to Lady Stanfield's feeble remonstrances, and perhaps also to certain prickings of his own conscience, "after all, there can be no harm in our following the example of people of such unexceptionable rank and position. If her Serene Highness the Grand Duchess of Blankburg and the Princess Pulowski,—to say nothing of innumerable English ladies of rank,—are not

ashamed to show themselves, it would be absurd for us to set ourselves up for Censors."

"But, my dear Sir John, it seems hardly fit for a young girl to sit shoulder to shoulder with those horrible women," murmured her ladyship.

"Psha!" ejaculated her husband. "When you go to Rome, you must do as the Romans do! And to hold oneself aloof from the amusements entered into by the highest society, would only be to proclaim oneself small-minded and prejudiced; failings which I regard as unpardonable in a public man."

Lady Stanfield contented herself with bowing her head and slightly raising her eyebrows. Little as she was given to exercise her perceptive and reflective faculties, this marvellous change of front exhibited by her lord and master, was the cause of considerable wonderment to her.

Of course Miss Effie was delighted with the glare and glitter, and meretricious excitement, which surrounded the gaming tables; but after her first *coup d'essai*, under the Duke's tutelage, a veto was put upon any further attempts

on her part to join actively in the play. However, this did not cause her much chagrin, for she found plenty of amusement in wandering through the marvellous saloons and beautiful gardens, or listening to the perfect music, so liberally provided by Mons. Blanc. Then she had the satisfaction of driving to the race-course on the box-seat of the Duke's so-called 'drag,' and paid him the delicate compliment of 'sporting his colours' on the occasion. Altogether Sir John, and presumably his volatile daughter, had every reason to be satisfied with the progress affairs were making. There could be no question that the Duke was decidedly fascinated. Not a day passed without bringing fresh proofs of his devotion. He almost forsook Baccara and Trente et quarante to spend his afternoons and evenings in Miss Stanfield's society. And when, at last, Sir John decided to journey southwards to Naples, their new friend made him promise to give him the pleasure of receiving them at his palace in Rome, which they were to take on their homeward way. In fact, he proffered many regrets and excuses that his engagements

prevented him from accompanying them, and doing the honours of *dolce Napoli* in person.

It is hardly necessary to state that during all this time, the memory of Harry Irvine and her vows of eternal love and constancy, had faded entirely from the mind of the little coquette. Or, if they presented themselves at all, seemed like some dim dream-shadows of the far-off past. Even when away from the Duke's fascinations,—for we must do her the justice to state that she fancied herself seriously enamoured of the brilliant stranger,—any qualms of conscience were promptly stifled by the reflection that it was evident from Harry's silence that he had given her up.

At Naples the same perfect weather and cloudless blue skies awaited the travellers. Even Lady Stanfield indulged in mild rhapsodies over the beauty of the bay, and the grand smoke-capped form of Vesuvius, seen through the translucent haze of early morning.

Sir John had been recommended to secure apartments at the Hotel Nobile, as being more healthily situated than any of the other caravansaries on the low-lying Chiaja. Accord-

ingly when they alighted at the station, they were dragged up the steep ascent, through quaint, narrow, dirty lanes, redolent of garbage and open sewers, where the sunlight had not yet penetrated, and where in fact both it, and the fresh air, appeared to be excluded on principle.

After passing the night in the train, having come straight through from Pisa without halting at Rome,—our travellers did not feel disposed to do much sight-seeing ; but remained in their apartments until the gong sounded for *table-d'hôte*.

The Hotel appeared to be fairly full ; but somewhat to Sir John's disgust, he found, after conning the list of visitors, and the faces of those present at table, no one with whom he could claim acquaintance, and on whom he could vent his favourite theories and crotchets.

A large majority of the guests appeared to hail from the other side of the Atlantic, and the baronet erroneously supposing that the citizens of that most democratic Republic would be wanting in respect and deference to a man of title, abstained from conversation

with his neighbour—an unmistakable Yankee. Lady Stanfield sat between her husband and daughter, and on Effie's right, was a young lady of eminently pleasing appearance and most charmingly dressed,—perhaps a little overdressed. Still her toilette was in the most perfect taste, and bore an unmistakable stamp of emanating from the studio of Worth or one of the other great Parisian artistes. Apparently the girl was of about Effie's own age. Her slightly aquiline nose and pointed chin, together with a classically shaped head on which masses of auburn hair with a golden streak in it, were artistically arranged, gave her an air of aristocratic *hauteur*, which however, was softened and modified by a pair of laughing blue eyes, and the most saucy little mouth. Effie amused herself with speculating as to who this brilliant apparition could be, and what relation she bore to the rather common-place looking female, plainly but handsomely dressed in grey silk, who sat by her side, and to whom she addressed all her conversation. The murmur and noise round the table, prevented Effie from hearing in what language they were

discoursing, but from the confused monotone which reached her ear, and from the inflexions of their voices, she judged they were not English; and yet they did not correspond to her notions of either French, Italian, or German types.

The puzzle was soon to be solved, for the young lady probably observing that she was the object of Effie's attention, and also that the notice taken of her, was of a flattering nature, turned her well-poised head, and remarked with a pleasant smile: “Naples is real elegant, Miss, isn't it?”

Effie was considerably taken aback by this unexpected style of address, and the slight nasal twang which accompanied it. To hide her confusion she murmured interrogatively “I beg your pardon?”

“I only observed, Miss, that Naples is a real elegant place.—Have you been round here much?”

“Oh, not long, we only arrived this morning,” replied Effie, recovering her equanimity, and more than half-inclined to laugh at the strange contrast between the form, and the form of speech, of her fair neighbour.

“Ah! well then, you’ve got a great deal to do, if you’re going round all the sights and show-places about these parts,” said the young American. “We’ve been touring round this past fortnight, and I reckon we’ve got heaps to see yet.”

“I suppose so,” replied Effie, “there are so many places of interest in this lovely neighbourhood: have you been up Vesuvius? I’m longing to go there. And to Herculaneum and Pompeii too.”

“We’ve been to Herculaneum and Pompeii, and I call them rather a take in. Why, you could put the whole of them into one of our big hotels at Saratoga or Chicago, and then have to go wandering round to find where they were. But we’ve still got to do Vesuvius; the fact is,” and here she dropped her voice, “my travelling companion isn’t great at climbing, and fights rather shy of the expedition. But I mean to go all the same before I leave. If I can’t get anybody else to go with me, I shall go alone.”

“Hav’n’t you any other friends,—no gentleman?” inquired Effie, more and more surprised.

"No, I'm just touring round Europe with this lady, Mrs. Ebenezer B. Walker. She's a widow, you know. Her husband was in the pork line at Chicago, and worth a good pile some years back, but there was a heavy fall in pork, and he bust up, poor man, and it kind'er broke his heart. Mrs. Walker's been to these parts before, and knows her way about, and as I wanted to come touring round Europe, and as my Pa can't leave his Wells—he's in 'ile,' you know — and poor mother being dead this three years and more, he thought it would be a kind'er charity to his old friend's wife, and make things right and square according to European notions, if she just came round with me."

Effie had not understood much more than half of this strange peroration, but that was enough to fill her with amazement, dashed with a tinge of the ludicrous. And yet for all the apparent vulgarity of the speaker's language, there was a sort of confiding openness in her manner, and a musical softness about her voice, which quivered with a touch of pathos when she spoke of her dead mother, that

seemed to neutralise their jarring effect, only leaving a sense of quaint oddity, rather amusing than otherwise.

"It must be very strange travelling like this, by yourself—without any friends," began Effie, then checking herself, fearing to wound the other's susceptibilities. "I suppose, though, you're used to it."

Her neighbour looked at her surprised ;
"You're English, I guess ?"

"Yes," replied Effie, smiling.

"And I reckon there's no need for me to inform you that I'm American. My name is Rosalind P. Sugg,—P. is Paulina, that was my poor dear mother's name. Not a pretty one, but I like it for her sake, and after all one name is as good as another. At least so we reckon in the States. I thought you must be English, I like Britishers from what I've seen of them, which isn't much—till last Fall, for they don't come much down West."

Again Effie was at a loss for a reply, Such a strange mixture of elegance and abruptness, aristocratic appearance and communistic ideas, and to crown all, the ludicrous incongruity of

the fair American's name, utterly bewildered her.

At last, by way of saying something, and not liking to be behind the other in frankness, she said: "My name is Effie Stanfield. This is my first visit abroad, and I don't think that I have ever met an American girl—young lady, before."

"Effie Stanfield! that's real pretty," repeated Miss Sugg, "and I may say that I'm most charmed to meet you, Miss Stanfield. For you look as nice as your name, and I reckon that's saying no end!"

Effie smiled and blushed. Her new acquaintance's quaint outspoken mode of speech amused and pleased her.

"That lady on your left is your mother, I guess? And the old gentleman on the other side, he's Mr. Stanfield. What line is he in, now? Dry goods or iron?"

Effie glanced nervously at her father, and laughed softly at the idea of the pompous Baronet being taken for a dealer in any goods, wet or dry.

"Yes, that's my father," she replied, "Sir John Stanfield."

The fair Miss Rosalind drew her lips together, and gave a sort of inward whistle.

"O! he's a *Sir*, is he? I hope you'll introduce me to him, I've often wanted to meet a Lord, or some of your bosses. I have read all about knights and nobles in Sir Walter Scott. Has he got a suit of chain-armour?"

"No," laughed Effie, "except some old suits in the hall, that used to belong to our ancestors."

"It seems a queer go. I guess I'd like to know what he is a knight for, and what he's done to make him different from other people."

Whilst Effie was cudgelling her brains for a suitable reply, Sir John and Lady Stanfield rose. So, turning with a smiling: "I must go now, I daresay we shall meet some other time," she returned her amusing neighbour's ceremonious bow, and followed her parents out of the room.

The next few days were spent by the Stanfield party in what the fair Miss Sugg called 'touring round Naples,' under the direction of their courier. Herculaneum, Pompeii, the Grotto of Pausilippo, Sorrento, Baiæ, Pozzuoli,

and all the varied spots of beauty and interest within easy range had been visited and admired. But there still remained Capri, Vesuvius, Pœstum, and other more considerable excursions to be made, before Bædeker and their conscientious cicerone would allow them to settle down to that most enjoyable method of enjoying Naples, the *dolce far niente*!

A sort of gloomy depression seemed to overhang Sir John, since he had parted with his friend the Duke. He missed the presence of some one outside the family circle, before whom, he could caracole with dignity on his favourite hobby, almost as much as the courteous and apparently appreciative listener himself.

Effie, too, had no longer an object for her brightest smiles, or an incentive to witty remarks, and brilliant epigrams.

In fact, both father and daughter felt like actors without an audience; for poor Lady Stanfield never counted for much more than a 'lay figure'.

Accordingly Effie was impelled one evening, —when the subject of making the ascent of

Vesuvius on the following day, was under discussion,—to suggest that her *table d'hôte* acquaintance should be invited to make one of the party.

"She is great fun, you know, Papa, and what's more, she is dying to be introduced to you. It's a regular case of love at first sight!"

"Nonsense, child," said Sir John, evidently flattered. "But I must say she has struck me as being a young lady of intelligence, and prepossessing appearance."

"There, mamma!" laughed Miss Effie, "you see the wicked man has noticed her all along, you really ought to be jealous?"

Lady Stanfield smiled in her habitually feeble manner, and returned to her Tauchnitz edition of some English novel!

Sir John, muttered "Psha!" two or three times, and pulled his moustaches, with something of his old lady-killing grace.

"You'll find her rather an 'eye-opener,'" continued his saucy daughter. "But she's 'real elegant' to look at, and I like her because there's no humbug about her."

"Effie!" murmured Lady Stanfield, in mild deprecation.

"Are you mad, child?" ejaculated the Baronet, wrathfully. "You know, Effie, I do not approve of vulgarity even in jest!"

"Well, Papa, I was only giving you an example of what you must expect; and if this horrifies you too much, perhaps we had better leave the fair Miss Sugg's desire unfulfilled? All the same, I think it would be a pity, for she would be somebody fresh to talk to, at any rate; and she has such a longing to speak with a real live nobleman."

"Well, well, perhaps we may ask her! One must make allowance for people who have been brought up outside the sphere of really good society. Of course the young lady can't help being born an American, and it is the duty of a public man to study all types," replied Sir John, carelessly, still secretly delighted at the thought of his conquest. "What did you say her name was?"

"Rosalind P. Sugg, Papa."

"Gracious Heavens! What could her parents be thinking about to give the poor girl such a horrible name?"

"I suppose they couldn't help it," laughed Effie, "and there's one thing, the pill will be pretty handsomely gilded, for from what she says, her father must be awfully rich!"

This decided the question, and accordingly Effie was permitted to write a little note, informing her friend that they purposed visiting the Observatory on the following morning, and offering her a seat in their carriage.

Miss Sugg's answer, gladly accepting the invitation, was soon brought back by Lady Stanfield's maid, and next morning at breakfast, the introduction was made in due form.

Sir John had assumed his most courtly manners, and Miss Sugg regarded him with a mixture of admiration and awe, which completely won his heart, and suggested to Effie, a child's first view of the lions at the 'Zoo'.

The fair American's face wore a puzzled expression for some time. She appeared to be expecting this animal of unknown species to do something extraordinary, or burst forth into language affectioned by Knights of Romance.

However, by the time that they had reached Resina, she had evidently come to the con-

clusion that Sir John was like other mortals ; and although, perhaps, a little disappointed, re-assumed her usual self-possessed air, and kept the little party amused—if sometimes scandalised—with her pungent remarks.

Having left their carriage at the Hermitage, they rode on mules and ponies to the foot of the great cinder crater, where Sir John and Lady Stanfield proposed to halt, not caring to encounter the fatigues of the ascent.

"I reckon I'm going right up to the very top," said Miss Sugg. "It'll never do for me to go back to the States, and not to be able to say that I've looked down the crater? Won't you come too, Miss Stanfield?"

"May I, Papa, I should like to, awfully?" asked Effie.

"It's hardly fit for young ladies," replied Sir John, "yet your friend can hardly go alone—"

"Begging your pardon, Sir John," interposed the courier, lifting his cap, "but if the young ladies want to go I will escort them, and with the help of some of these men and their ropes, the ascent is not so very difficult."

Eventually Sir John gave way, and the two girls scrambled up the almost perpendicular cone of hot ashes, and had the satisfaction of listening to the far-down rumblings of the mighty cauldron, besides cooking eggs by the heat emitted from the smoking pile of semi-extinct cinders, and going through all the various little performances which form the stock-in-trade of the guides !

Whether Sir John was impatient at being kept waiting so long, or was tired of 'standing on his hind-legs' for the benefit of a young lady, whose veneration and adulation did not quite come up to his preconceived standard and notion of what was his due, certain it is that on the return journey, he descended from the lofty pedestal of condescending affability, and relapsed into his undress uniform of peevish pomposity.

This change, though not unnoticed by their new acquaintance, did not affect that young lady's flow of spirits !

She chatted on gaily about things in general, and Vesuvius in particular. Expressed regret that the latter had not seen fit to 'erupt' for

her special benefit, and reckoned that if her Pa's 'He Wells' were lighted, they'd make a blaze which would cause Vesuvius, to 'cave in' and hide its 'two cents' worth of smoke and sulphur' for very shame.

It was evident from Sir John's face that the eccentric Americanisms and far-fetched imageries, at which he had smiled approval in the morning were no longer regarded as witticisms; but rather as vulgarities, which he, out of pure courtesy, endeavoured to pass unheeded.

When they alighted at their hotel he bowed formally to the fair American, who was artlessly pouring out her thanks for their kind 'chaperonage,' and in response to her outstretched hand offered her the extreme tips of his fingers; the dread import of which that irrepressible young lady failed to recognise, exclaiming in the friendliest tones, "I guess, Sir John, you're nigh beat with that drive,—your fingers seem quite stiff! Never mind, I dare-say you'll be all right after you've picked a bit, and had a night's rest."

When the Stanfields reached their own apartments, the irate baronet turned to his

daughter, "Really, Effie, you should use more circumspection in selecting your acquaintances, my nerves have been quite shaken by the coarse vulgarity to which they have been subjected!"

"Well, I told you what to expect, Papa, and you yourself said that she was very amusing at first. Besides, I thought that as a public man you wanted to study a new type."

"Be so good as not to misapply my words, I don't like it," said Sir John; then feeling himself worsted in the argument, he retired to his own room, banging the door after him, to Lady Stanfield's discomfort and his unrepentant daughter's amusement.

Fortunately for the family peace, the unconscious delinquent informed Effie, when next they met, that having heard of the arrival in Rome of some Chicago friends, she and Mrs. Walker had decided to 'take the cars' for that city on the following morning.

Although she had quite made up her mind to champion her new-found friend, against what she considered her father's unjust strictures, Effie was not altogether sorry that the

'bone of contention' was to be removed. But true to her colours, she endeavoured to make up for the iciness of her father's adieux, by the warmth with which she shook the fair Rosalind's hand, and wished her a pleasant journey.

CHAPTER XV.

DURING his daughter's illness Mr. Melville had dragged on a melancholy and listless existence. He was so utterly wanting in energy and moral ballast, so accustomed to hobble through life, leaning on Rose's strong arm, that he felt like a cripple deprived of his crutches and turned out of hospital to shift for himself.

Is it to be wondered at, that under these circumstances, he regarded Mrs. Tod Mountjoy, —who continued her daily visitations, brought him little scraps of village gossip, and enticed him for occasional walks in the grounds, when the weather was favourable,—as a ministering angel? Or, that entertaining these sentiments for her, and being fully aware that they were reciprocated, he should have taken advantage of the absence of his sister and daughter, both of whom he knew would cordially disapprove

of the match,—to offer his hand and shattered fortunes to the sympathetic widow? Knowing what we do of her, it is perhaps needless to say that he was accepted, without more than, what she considered, a decent show of hesitation.

Thanks to the favouring circumstances, she had landed her fish much more easily than she had expected; and was consequently quite prepared to coincide with his wish, that for the present at any rate, their engagement should be kept secret.

Even her bosom friend Adelina Partridge, although she had a shrewd suspicion which way matters were tending, and neglected no opportunity of throwing out "feelers" on the subject, could not obtain an open avowal from her old gossip.

However, as that young lady considered that "Toddie" deprived of the protection of the maternal wing, would fall an easier captive to her "bow and spear," she felt none of the envious heart-burnings which usually filled her virgin breast, on hearing of the engagements of her friends, and viewed the impending union with equanimity.

Shortly after Mr. Melville had definitely committed himself, Ralph Ashwood arrived on a visit, having come straight from Ashwood Court, where he had passed a few weeks on his return from the Cape.

The first meeting was very embarrassing for Mr. Melville. Ever since Alfred's disappearance and the hints conveyed by Mr. Irvine, of his flagrant abuse of trust with respect to the Ashwood property, Mr. Melville had been intending to inform himself fully of the nature and extent of his son's misdeeds. But as usual he had lacked the necessary energy and courage, and putting off the evil hour from day to day, was still unaware of the real facts of the case.

Thus the unhappy father was tortured by the desire to know whether the present owner of the property had been informed how matters had progressed—or rather retrograded—during his absence, and if so, whether Ralph would be inclined to act as leniently towards the young scapegrace, as he had counted on Herbert doing.

To his great delight, Ralph Ashwood displayed the most friendly feeling towards him ;

commiserated with him on his daughter's sad troubles and his own disappointment, whilst giving him to understand in the most delicate manner possible, that he was ready—as far as in him lay, to take the place of his dead cousin.

In the course of conversation he mentioned casually that he had received a letter from his lawyers, informing him of Alfred's misconduct. "But you see, my dear Sir,"—he continued, "that it would ill become me to take a stern view of the case, seeing that I am to some extent answerable for it. There is one way in which the wrong can be repaired, and some day I may point it out to you and ask your consent and adhesion. It is too soon after my poor cousin's—" and here the words appeared to choke him—"after our sad loss, to talk sentiment and make plans for the future; but speaking as one man of the world to another, I may tell you that it lies in your daughter's hands to cement a lasting friendship and alliance between us."

Mr. Melville was so overjoyed at the promise contained in these words, that he grasped the

young man's hand with almost hysterical fervour, and in the warmth of his heart confided to him his intention of taking unto himself a second help-mate.

Ralph pondered a few minutes, a strange smile playing about his sarcastic mouth. Then he said: “I think you are quite right, Sir, although I have not the pleasure of knowing the lady. I am afraid, from what I can gather, that Master Alfred is not likely to favour you with much of his society for some time to come; and if my earnest hopes are to be fulfilled—as I trust they will be at no very distant period,—you will want a female hand to lighten your household cares, and a woman's sympathy and companionship to supply the place of your dear daughter. After all,” he continued, in a lighter tone, “we men have eventually to seek our true happiness and comfort in the other sex. Ambition, Freedom, Sport, and the delights of bachelorhood, are high-sounding words, and suffice for a man starting on his career, full of youth and hope and belief in himself and the world! But a few years of knocking about, a short experience of the

hollowness of all that he has striven for and prized, make him turn to love, or at anyrate, domestic peace and happiness, as a refuge from all his troubles and disappointments ! ”

Never since he had known him, had Mr. Melville heard Ralph Ashwood speak in this strain. He had been wont to regard him as essentially a man of the world, cold, ambitious and cynical. Now, there was a weary listlessness in his manner, a sort of feverish longing in his tone, when he spoke of Rest and Peace, as though they were the only desiderata for which he had the heart to strive.

“ I suppose it’s his cousin’s sad death, and the unexpectedness of his own accession to fortune that have turned his head ! ” mused the old gentleman ; “ though I’m inclined to think that at his age, an addition of ten thousand a-year to my income would have had a very different effect upon me !—but there’s no understanding the present generation ! ”

However, as under the circumstances, nothing could have been more opportune than Ralph’s change of sentiments, his prospective

father-in-law was not inclined to cavil at the cause, whatever it might be.

Nor was this the only respect in which a strange metamorphosis was observable in the young man.

His former bold and almost defiant bearing, had given place to a stooping and listless gait. His eyes, though restless and glittering, no longer looked straight into his interlocutor's face, as though striving to bore down into his inmost thoughts, but rather drooped and quivered, avoiding any direct interchange of glances.

Exposure to the hot African sun had naturally bronzed and darkened his skin, but no glow of health shone beneath the outward colouring, which only gave a jaundiced appearance to his shrunken cheeks.

In fact, any unbiased observer who had known Ralph Ashwood twelve months before, and now beheld him again, was bound to exclaim to himself—if not aloud: "What a wreck of his former self!"

And truly, a pitiful wreck he was—not only in body—but in mind.

His friends—and *now* they were many (for Ovid knew the world when he said :

"Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos
Tempora si fuerint nubila—solus eris !")

charitably attributed it to the shock caused by the tragical termination of the shooting expedition, and accounted it to him as a virtue.

"Have you seen Ashwood ? he's terribly cut up, poor fellah ! Shouldn't have thought he possessed so much—thingamagummy—sensitivity—and all that sort of thing—don't you know. Must have been awfully chummy with his cousin—Sort of Orestes and Pylades business. Shows you can't tell what kind of fellah—a fellah is—from the exterior—don't you know !"

This was the sort of gossip that, later on, went the round of the clubs, and probably expressed—though in somewhat different language—the opinion of the world at large.

We—who have had a peep behind the scenes, and know that he was only 'reaping what he had sowed'—have less cause for wonderment.

A man of keen susceptibilities—and refined

intellect—misapplied and perverted as they may have been—cannot, from his very nature, commit a foul crime, with the same immunity from remorse, as the ignorant lout, who simply follows an instinct of his brutish nature, in slaying his fellow-man for greed or revenge.

The former may have the advantage over the latter, in skilfully laying his plans to avoid possibility of detection; he may even steel his heart by hatred, lust, or specious argument, to view murder, as the necessary removal of an obstacle from the path on which he has set himself to walk, or as a private execution adjudged by his own paramount necessities. He may, we repeat, convince himself of all this *before* the crime. But—the fell deed once accomplished—the triumph reaped—then—he were far happier—as ‘Hodge,’ who has kicked his wife to death, because she withheld the coveted coppers for more drink.—Even as Hodge, captured, convicted, and lying under the sentence of the law!—He at least knows no mental anguish.—His worst torments are a sort of stupid wonderment at his own foolishness in administering that last blow,

which overstepped the line between the permissible, and the punishable, in the way of wife-torture—and a vague bodily dread of the 'leap' he is presently to take into 'Eternity,' as the parson calls it—into 'Nothingness,' as he thinks—if he is capable of thinking about it at all.

How can his besotted, unawakened intelligence grasp the Immeasurable?

What is Eternity to him? What has Life been that he should care much to prolong it?

A weary round of working, eating (or starving), drinking, and sleeping.—Nothing to beautify it—nothing to look forward to, but the next opportunity of getting drunk!

Of course, he must be handed over to the tender mercies of the hangman—on the same principle that a mad dog, or wild bull, must be destroyed for the well-being of society.—But this man's crime no more stands on the same footing as that of an intellectual and cultivated villain, than does his bodily punishment with the other's mental torments.

Sooner or later the avenger will make his presence felt, and then woe to the unhappy

wretch who has deluded himself into the belief that Conscience is an invention of fools and old women, and that there is no just God in the world !

Ralph Ashwood had flattered himself that his mind was fully imbued with the doctrine, that Self is the only Divinity worthy of worship, and this world the only sphere in which mortals are ever likely to figure. His belief in the Supremacy of Intellect, and the Power of Will, had led him to the conviction that no act of his, provided it were dictated by Necessity and crowned with Success, could ever cause him a moment's uneasiness, whatever suffering it might have entailed upon his weaker, and consequently contemptible fellow-mortals.

“After all,” he used to say to himself, “the old Pagan philosophy of ‘*Might is Right*,’ and ‘*Everyone for Himself*,’ is the only true one ! All this cant about ‘*moral obligations*,’ and the ‘*brotherhood of man*,’ is the invention of a wily priesthood. Not being strong enough to gain their ends by force, they resort to stratagem ! Well, that's their business, and

the business of their dupes, amongst whom they shall not have the honour of counting me!"

Mercy and pity he had regarded as other words for weakness, and erased them from his vocabulary. Conscience was a coward's dread of detection, and he would have none of it.

Thus he had entered on his career of crime with a light heart, and free from the encumbrances which clog the action of a man who has not succeeded in stifling all the promptings of his better nature.

We must, however, do him the justice to state, that covetousness, the mere hungering after Wealth for its own sake, had not been the mainspring of his actions.

Doubtless, he had viewed the Ashwood property as a desirable acquisition, and himself as in some sort, deprived of his rights by his more fortunate cousin; still, we question whether these considerations alone, in spite of all his vaunted philosophy, would have driven him to the desperate act, which now filled him with dire remorse, argue as he would that it was dictated by Wisdom and Justice.

Jealousy, a mad, insane passion—as uncontrollable as it was sudden—for the girl from whose affections he imagined he had been ousted by Herbert, supplied the spark, which fired the train of his long-accumulated store of hatred !

And now, his revenge had been gratified ! Not a breath of suspicion had been raised, and in that far-distant land, no traces of the fell deed were ever likely to be found, or dragged up in evidence against him !

He had succeeded to the utmost extent of his hopes !

Fortune was his ; his rival removed from his path, and although the object of his desire was still to be ' wooed and won,' he had obtained her father's consent, and in the knowledge of her brother's misdeeds, held a lever, which could be brought to bear with irresistible effect, in case his persuasions failed to move her !

What more could he want ? What was it that stood between himself and happiness, or at least content ?

Nothing that his intellectual theories could justify or even admit !

And yet, he was haunted by a dread spectre, —a shuddery, intangible, ever-present Horror, which seemed to press on his brain, and gibe at and mock him, until at times his very reason tottered in its seat.

Night was the time when its presence became most real, most awful ! Sleep was driven from his eyes,—which, open or shut,—seemed to behold nothing but the mangled and bloody form of his murdered cousin !

In vain he struck a light, and roused himself to pace the room ! In vain he argued that he did not repent, and would not repent ; that if the same deed were to be done over again he would do it without faltering. Whilst the defiant thoughts were still in his mind, he knew that he lied to himself !

Remorse,—silent, awful, inevitable, had claimed him for her own, and never more would peace or happiness be his !

Fierce and terrible were the struggles, that he waged with the implacable tormentor. At times he would rage like any raving lunatic, and then sink quivering on the floor, or burying his head in the bed clothes, cry aloud

to God or the Devil to deliver him. More than once he was on the verge of committing suicide—But at the thought of Rose Melville, his strength of will and obstinacy of purpose reasserted themselves—Why should he quit this world until the object for which he had longed and toiled, and intrigued, Aye! and for which he had not scrupled to dye his hands with a fellow-creature's blood,—was attained?

Had he become such a weak-minded dolt, that after all he had risked—not only in the past, but in the future,—for, strange as it may seem, a belief in a dread Hereafter was beginning to force itself on his reluctant convictions,—he should fail to grasp the prize within his reach?

After a time the paroxysm would pass off, leaving him utterly worn out and exhausted, to drag through another day in perpetual dread of the coming night.

Sometimes, by sheer force of will, he would ward off these attacks for days together, but this was when some urgent necessity arose for him to conceal his mental torments from the world; or when some strong excitement filled

his mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Thus, during his visit at Ashwood Court, he had appeared before the bereaved mother, calm and composed even to coldness.—And she who prided herself on her self-possession and undemonstrativeness, reading, as she thought, the symptoms of his secret sorrow and regret, believed in him and admired him a thousand times more than if he had made an extravagant display of his grief.

Later on again, in his interviews with his cousin's solicitors, with regard to the transfer of property, nothing could have been more decorous, than his self-possessed, yet subdued demeanour.

Yet he paid dearly for these short periods of immunity.

Ere long the remorseless spectre seized him again in its weird clutches, and enveloped him with its bloody pall, pushing him ever nearer and nearer to the verge of madness.

Ah! What he suffered! What can be more terrible to a man, proud of his intellect and his power of knowledge, than to feel his brain sapped, his wisdom annihilated by the

insidious attacks of a relentless foe? To know that at times he is no longer master of himself, that sooner or later he will be forced to betray his gruesome secret to others,—and see them start—and turn away with dread and loathing, —to hear them whisper the fearful words which would sound his doom :—“ Good God ! He is *mad* !”

His one chance of safety,—so he believed,—lay in Rose Melville.

If he could persuade her to love him ever so little,—or even let him devote his life and fortune to her happiness—on any terms,—the avenging spirit might be appeased !

And yet, while he longed with so ardent a longing to see her again, to hear her voice, to feel the touch of her hand,—whilst she seemed to his heated imagination, the only sanctuary where his tortured soul could take refuge from its pursuers, he let week after week elapse, without daring to intrude himself upon her presence !

The terrible illness with which she was stricken after the intelligence of Herbert's death, demonstrated beyond a doubt the depth and genuineness of her love for him.

This was a factor, of which hitherto, Ralph had not taken much account. But now, it stood out before him as a stern reality, which might upset all his calculations!

What, if she were to turn upon him with those awful words which foreshadowed the doom of the first murderer: "What hast thou done with thy brother?"

He dare not, he would not allow himself to dwell long on such a possibility. And yet it intruded itself unbidden, and kept him,—the man of firm resolves and prompt action—hesitating and dallying like any schoolboy in the throes of his first love affair.

During this time he was possessed with a feverish restlessness. He would remain at the Manor House for a week; then dash off to London for a few days at a moment's notice; then back again to Stoneheaton; all the time craving for news of the invalid at Torquay, and eagerly questioning Mr. Melville as to the probability of his being able to see her, if he made the journey.

Rose's father, who naturally did not share in the intensity of her grief, and,—though he had

felt a decent sort of commiseration with Herbert's sad end,—was more concerned with the living representative of the Ashwood property than the dead one ;—assured his guest that as soon as his daughter was well enough to receive any visitors she would be delighted to see him. Then mindful of the adage about : ‘ striking whilst the iron is hot,’ had written off to Mrs. Irvine to sound Rose on the subject, and prepare her for Ralph's appearance.

Mr. Melville's words acted like a cordial on his guest's depressed spirits—He was in the mood to clutch at any straw, or surely he would have reflected on the vanity of accepting a man's—and least of all such a man's—assurances, as to the disposition of his daughter's affections.

But Ralph was no longer capable of reflection—Haunted and terror-stricken, he felt that uncertainty was no longer bearable, and at last determined to journey to Torquay and learn his fate, whatever it might be, from Rose's own lips.



